

Timothy Taylor

Alekhine alert!

a repertoire for Black against 1 e4



EVERYMAN CHESS

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Computer Programs and Databases

Fritz 11

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MegaCorr4 (Chess Mail)

Chessbase.com

Chessgames.com

Correspondence Database

Internet Chess Club

Dedication and Acknowledgments

To my beautiful wife Liz

Extra special thanks for continued inspiration to Dario Argento
and the late Pauline Réage

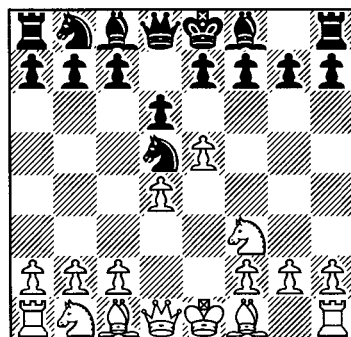
Introduction

Do you want to counter-attack on move one? If your answer is “Yes”, then *Alekhine Alert* is for you – but the book you hold in your hands is quite different from previous works on this opening.

Over the years I have accumulated no less than five books on Alekhine’s Defence – in publication order, these are *Alekhine’s Defence* by R.G.Eales and A.H.Williams (1973); *Alekhine Defense* by Norman Weinstein (no apostrophe this time, but ‘s’ instead of ‘c’ – 1977); *The Complete Alekhine* by Graham Burgess (1992); *Alekhine’s Defence* by Nigel Davies (2001); and finally, *Starting Out: Alekhine’s Defence* by John Cox (2004).

All of these are worthy books, but I have no interest in repeating or, at best, slightly updating their labours. My approach will be entirely different.

The above quintet try to cover all lines of Alekhine’s Defence, and all of them give quite a bit of space to “well-known theoretical lines” that I consider outmoded and simply not worth the time it would take to study them. For example, after 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 (the dangerous Modern Line)



all of the above books give considerable coverage to 4...♗g4 – but I won’t.

Here's what I think of 4...♖g4: Black must learn a great deal of theory in order to survive to a rather poor position. Why then should one study it? The book you hold in your hands is the first *repertoire book* on the Alekhine. If you want a general book, you can pick any of the fine books listed above – but this one is personal and specific.

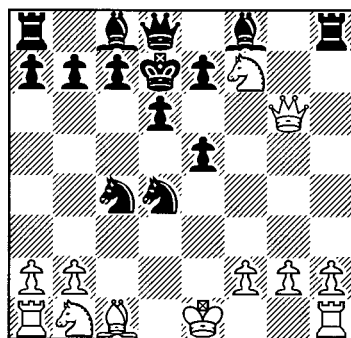
I am going to recommend only lines that I personally like and play myself. I am not going to recommend any lines where you have to know theory to move 20 just to survive. For example, in the Modern Line mentioned above, I advocate the Larsen/Miles/Carlsen continuation 4...dxe5, and then after 5 ♖xe5 I will cover in depth what I think are Black's two best continuations: 5...g6 (Kengis) and 5...c6 (Carlsen). I will not give more than a nod to 5...♗d7, because one could spend the whole book analyzing the sacrifice 6 ♖xf7 – and then what? You could probably play 5...♗d7 ten times without ever facing the sacrifice, as most of your cautious opponents will simply answer 6 ♖f3, when the game will likely transpose to Kengis lines, which you could have reached directly – but then, your eleventh opponent will come wired to the gills and play 6 ♗xf7 – you will have forgotten all the variations that you studied a year ago – and he will crush you with the latest *Fritz* continuation on move 23!

This is not the fate I want for any of my readers!

Therefore I have steered clear of recommending any particularly computeresque variations, such as 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 ♗c6!? 5 c4 ♗b6 6 e6!? fxe6 or 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 f4 dxe5 6 fxe5 c5 7 d5 e6. Both of these variations include queen sacrifices as theory! You think I'm joking? In Davies' book he gives the following game:

L.Wydrowski-A.Marcinkiewicz correspondence 1997

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 ♗c6 5 c4 ♗b6 6 e6 fxe6 7 ♗g5 e5 8 ♗d3 ♗xd4 9 ♖h5+ g6 10 ♗xg6+ hxg6 11 ♖xg6+ ♗d7 12 ♖f7 ♗xc4!?

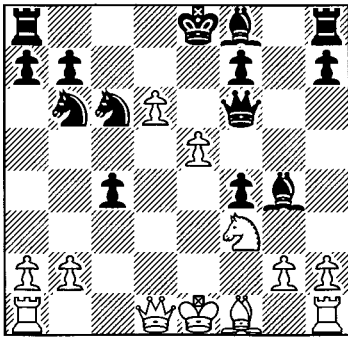


(yes, Black is giving up a queen for two pieces!) 13 ♗xd8 ♗xd8 14 b3 ♖f5 15 ♖f7 ♗b6 16 ♗e3 ♖h7 17 ♖g8 ♗c2+ 18 ♗e2 ♗d7 19 ♗xb6 axb6 20 ♗c3 ♖g7 21 ♖c4 ♖g4 22 ♖f7 ♗g6 23 ♖d5 ♗d4+ 24 ♗d1 c6 25 ♖c4 b5 26 ♗xb5 ♗c2+ 27 ♗e1 cxb5 0-1

Or this one, from *Starting Out: Alekhine's Defence* – I like a queen sacrifice with breakfast myself!

D.Bryson-T.Luther Bled Olympiad 2002

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 dxe5 6 fxe5 c5 7 d5 e6 8 ♘c3 exd5 9 cxd5 c4 10 d6 ♘c6 11 ♘f3 ♕g4 12 ♕f4 g5 13 ♘e4 gxf4 14 ♘f6+ ♖xf6!



(another queen sacrificed for two pieces!) 15 exf6 0-0-0 16 ♖c1 ♜e8+ 17 ♜f2 ♕xd6 18 ♕xc4 ♕c5+ 19 ♜f1 ♕e3 20 ♖c3 ♘xc4 21 ♖xc4 ♜d8 22 ♜e1 ♜xf3 23 gxf3 ♜d2 24 ♜e2 ♜d1+ 25 ♜e1 ♜d2 26 ♜e2 ♜d1+ 27 ♜e1 ♜d2 28 ♜e2 ½-½

You might enjoy studying these at home, for fun, if you have time, and you might surprise someone with a “my computer is better than your computer” line, but this book has a different aim.

So what is the goal of *Alekhine Alert*?

Just this: I will give the prospective Alekhine player a sound but not too theoretical repertoire against everything White can throw at this defence – but I warn you in advance, White will throw a lot of *junk*!

And one has to take this junk seriously, for one will face it much more often than the critical lines. Almost a hundred years of experience have made it clear that the strongest test of Alekhine’s bold counter-attack is this aforementioned Modern Line – here are the moves again: 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3. World Champion Anand plays this exclusively, with great results (out of eleven games in the database he has scored nine wins, two draws, and not a single loss!). One would think you would face this line all the time – but not so at all.

Anand clearly takes the Alekhine seriously, and always seems well prepared when he faces it – but most people tend to view the cheeky knight counter as some kind of nonsense that can be met with any junk lying about – as though champions of the defence like Alekhine himself, Vassily Smyslov and Bobby Fischer were just crazed amateurs having a fling!

Consider the Sousse Interzonal of 1967, for example: the best players in the world are vying for the world title, and some of these “weak” players (Larsen! Korchnoi! Mecking! Hort!) play Alekhine’s Defence. Among them they play 1 e4 ♘f6 five times (Larsen played

it twice). Did any of their esteemed opponents play the strong and critical Modern Line? Not a chance! Two of the five white players tried the largely inoffensive Exchange Variation (2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 exd6) where White hopes for a slight edge at best, but hardly challenges the Alekhine. Two more white players tried the completely inoffensive 2 e5 ♖d5 3 ♖c3 which has never given White more than equality since Alekhine cleanly equalized against Sämisch (see Game 65) in 1921! Finally, one World Championship contender wouldn't even push the centre pawn past the meridian and defended with 2 ♗c3.

What were the results? *Black won all five games.*

Nothing much has changed today. Unless you face Anand, your opponents will probably throw everything at you *except* the Modern Line! My experience is quite typical. In recent years I have played the Alekhine eleven times and have faced the following variations: The most common line was the Exchange Variation (three games) but this is no way for White to get an advantage – if in fact he wants one. Many players play this way out of trendy pacifism: that is, they aim for a draw with White. Two opponents played what is probably the worst playable answer to 1...♗f6, namely the pitifully passive 2 d3. This was played just as often as the two opponents who actually went for the strong Modern Line.

That accounts for seven games: in the other four I faced Sämisch's inoffensive 3 ♗c3, the even more inoffensive 2 ♗c3, the no-name 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 ♗f3!?, and finally the optically impressive Four Pawns Attack just once.

To sum up, I faced the dangerous Modern Line just 18% of the time, and the absurdly retrograde 2 d3 just as often! I learned how to fight against White's drawish Exchange Variation 27% of the time, more than any other line; and another 27% of the time I faced an assortment of harmless variations.

I faced the sharp Four Pawns Attack (2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♗b6 5 f4) only once, or just 9%.

And I scored, with Black, four wins, three losses and four draws, for a healthy plus score of almost 55% (one recalls that normally White scores this kind of percentage) and it's worth noting that I was playing substantially higher rated opponents in three of these games.

These statistics do give a very good reason to play the Alekhine's Defence: most of the time you will face not very good lines that you should be able to equalize cleanly against, or even get the advantage right out of the opening! You must, of course, be prepared for the dangerous Modern Line, but I will give two good, related variations here, so even if you face it you can react with confidence.

As for the “inoffensive” moves, I am going (for the first time in an Alekhine book) to give what I think is *best* rather than what is strictly Alekhine’s Defence. In other words, if the best line is to transpose to the French, then transpose to the French! (Game 61). If the best move is to transpose to the Four Knight’s Game (Game 70) then bring on more horsepower! If the best calls for moving your king on move three, then call your king Steinitz and move him on out! (Game 74).

In every case my repertoire lines are based not on long memorized variations but rather on solid positional concepts.

In Chapter One I will show how World Champions have upheld the honour of Alekhine’s Defence; and after that, I will take on *all* of White’s tries, starting with the dangerous Modern

Line (Chapters Two, Three and Four) and then work my way down to the “savage” 2 d3 and 2 f3 of Chapter Ten. Most of the chapters will start with a game featuring “Lines I Don’t Like” – usually theory-heavy, overrated variations – and then will proceed to my recommendations. Also, each chapter will feature a hero such as Larsen or Korchnoi who has championed my proposed repertoire – all GMs except for one lowly IM (you can guess who that is!) spotlighted in Chapter Ten.

If you work all the way through this book, I promise you that you will come away with a sound and playable repertoire to battle 1 e4 with 1...♘f6!.

Timothy Taylor
Los Angeles
January 2010

Chapter One

World Champions Play Alekhine's Defence

Our Hero: Alexander Alekhine

The great World Champion Alexander Alekhine introduced 1 e4 ♘f6 into high-level tournament play at Budapest 1921, though he was not the first to try out the opening. Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte was known to play this defence – actually much more a counter-attack than a defence – in his bedroom! (see the notes to Game 73). Despite Napoleon's conquests, the opening became known as Alekhine's Defence and was quickly given a try by the reigning world champion Capablanca. This is one "offbeat" opening that has been generally approved by the best players in modern chess history, so in this chapter we will see Alekhine's Defence wins by Capablanca, Alekhine (naturally), Dr. Euwe, Bronstein (the scientific Botvinnik

would not send a knight scurrying across the board in some non-engineered protocol, but his rival Bronstein, who tied his world championship match with Botvinnik, played the Alekhine often, and with flair), Smyslov, Tal, Petrosian, Spassky, and of course Fischer, who uncorked 1...♘f6 twice in his world championship match with Spassky, and scored probably the decisive win of the match with it!

But before we get to these chess kings of the past, let's salute the young man who has put the Alekhine back on the contemporary chess map – the future world champion Magnus Carlsen! I only wish that when I played Magnus, I had answered his 1 e4 with 1...♘f6! – for the record I played 1...c5 and he crushed me!

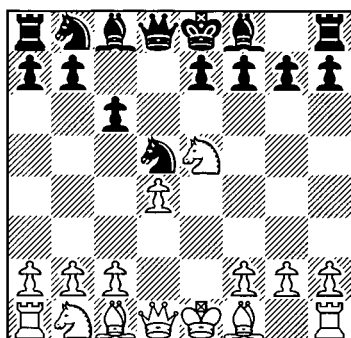
Game 1

V.Topalov-M.Carlsen Morelia-Linares 2008

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3 dxe5 5
♗xe5

The dangerous and less well-known pawn recapture, 5 dxe5, is covered in Chapter Two.

5...c6



Just like Fischer's win in Game 13 of his match vs. Spassky, this extremely high-level success in a "Super Tournament" provoked great interest in Alekhine's counter-attack.

This move order, favoured by Carlsen, will be covered in Chapter Four, while the Kengis Variation with 5...g6 will be examined in Chapter Three.

6 ♗d3

This move and other alternatives such as 6 ♗c4 and ♗e2 will be covered extensively in Chapter Four.

6...♗d7 7 ♗xd7

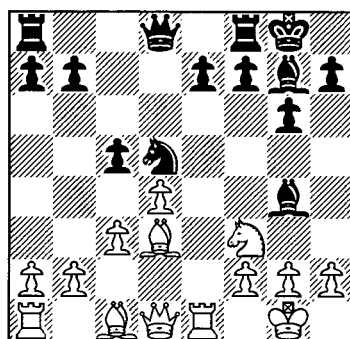
Develops Black, and the strong white knight vanishes. 7 0-0 is better,

for which see Game 30. The text move shows tentative and unsure play – but I'm sure that World Champion contender Topalov has studied the opening since this debacle.

7...♗xd7 8 0-0 g6

For the purposes of my recommended repertoire, it's vital that the student study and understand *both* Chapters Three and Four, as the Carlsen lines featuring 5...c6 and the Kengis lines featuring 5...g6 often transpose into each other (as here) and are linked by similar positional ideas.

9 ♗d2 ♗g7 10 ♗f3 0-0 11 ♖e1 ♗g4 12
c3 c5!



Black takes the initiative with this beautiful combination based on the insecure bishop on d3, and utilizing the pinned knight as well: in some variations where the e1-rook is captured, White does not have ♗xe1.

Another way of looking at the position is that a 2700 player with White is fighting for survival after only 12 moves! Would this happen in any other opening?

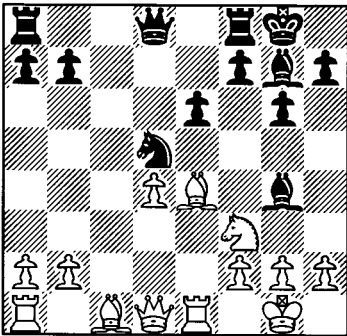
13 ♖e4

The best try; 13 dxc5 is obviously critical, but after 13...♞xc3! 14 bxc3 ♙xc3 15 ♖h6 (15 ♙e3 ♙xe1 is much better for Black, as White has no good way to recapture the bishop) 15...♙xe1 16 ♙xf8 ♜xf8 17 ♙e4 ♙c3 18 ♙xb7 ♞b8 19 ♞xd8+ ♞xd8 20 ♞c1 ♙a5 Black's two bishops and centre pawn give him some edge in the endgame, e.g. 21 g3 f6 22 ♙g2 e5 etc.

13...cxd4 14 cxd4

White has a somewhat weak isolani, but the single weakness should be manageable.

14...e6

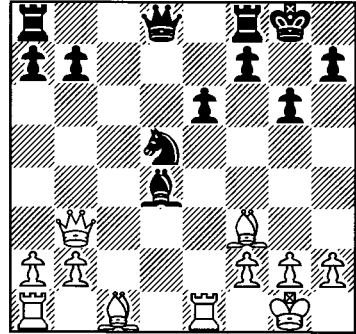


15 ♞b3?

White tries to generate some play by giving up the d-pawn, but Carlsen grabs said pawn and hangs on to it like a bulldog, finally scoring the full point solely due to that extra pawn. If Topalov had not been so shaken by the opening surprise, he would probably have defended solidly with 15 h3! ♙xf3 16 ♙xf3 ♞c8 17 ♙e3 when I don't really see anything for Black: White is now

planning ♞b3 without a sacrifice, and if 17...♞xe3 18 fxe3 e5 19 d5 White's passed pawn gives him adequate counterplay.

15...♙xf3 16 ♙xf3 ♙xd4



Black chops a pawn and lengthens the fianchettoed bishop's diagonal, a key idea in all Kengis positions.

17 ♙xd5

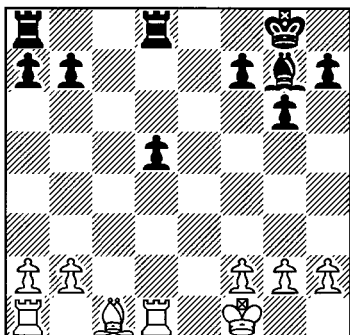
White doesn't improve with 17 ♞xb7 as Black tempos off the rook with 17...♞a5, and then after 18 ♞d1 ♞ab8 19 ♞d7 ♞fd8 20 ♞c6 ♙xb2 21 ♙xb2 ♞xb2 Black keeps the pawn.

17...♞xd5 18 ♞xd5 exd5 19 ♞d1 ♙g7 20 ♙f1

White still can't get his pawn back, due to little tactics: 20 ♞xd5 ♞fd8 21 ♞xd8+ (if 21 ♞d2 ♞ac8 with the idea of ...♞xc1+ forces ♞d8+ anyway) 21...♞xd8 22 ♙e3 (22 ♙f1 ♞d1+ 23 ♙e2 ♞h1 24 h3 ♙h6 is even worse) 22...♙xb2 23 ♞b1 b6 and Black is a clean pawn up.

Note again the strength of Black's dark-squared bishop, which now rules the entire long diagonal.

20...♞fd8



The dust has settled and Black is up one good pawn. Carlsen now gives a demonstration of world-class technique.

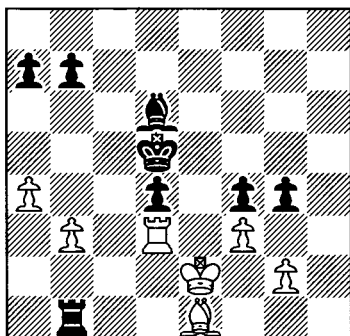
21 ♖g5 ♜d7 22 ♜d2 h6 23 ♙e3 d4 24 ♜d3 ♜c8 25 ♙d2 ♜c2 26 ♜b1 ♜e7 27 a4 f5 28 b3 ♜ec7 29 ♙e1 ♙f7 30 ♜d2 ♜c1 31 ♜xc1 ♜xc1 32 ♙e2 ♜b1 33 ♜d3 ♙e6 34 h4 ♙d5

White is reduced to passivity, while the black king rules the centre.

35 ♙d2 ♙e4 36 ♜g3 f4 37 ♜d3

The only problem with 37 ♜xg6 is 37...d3 mate!

37...♙e5 38 f3+ ♙d5 39 ♙e1 ♙d6 40 ♙d2 g5 41 hxg5 hxg5 42 ♙e1 g4!



The decisive break.

43 fxg4

White must take, for if 43 ♙f2 ♙e5 44 ♙e1 g3 45 a5 ♙d6 46 ♙c3 ♙c5 47 ♙e1 (47 b4 ♙c4 48 bxc5 dxc3 wins immediately) 47...♙e5 he falls into zugzwang and must lose material.

43...♙e4 0-1

The king is a strong piece! White resigns, for if 44 ♙h4 (likewise 44 ♙f2 ♜b2+ 45 ♜d2 d3+ 46 ♙e1 ♜b1+ 47 ♜d1 ♙b4+) 44...♜b2+ 45 ♜d2 d3+ 46 ♙e1 (46 ♙d1 ♜b1 mate is a mercy death) 46...♙b4 wins a rook and mates soon.

A tremendous win by Carlsen, but one sees he was helped by the opening surprise.

Now let's take a look at past World Champions (including one "co-champion!") who have scored with Alekhine's Defence. We begin with Alekhine's constant rival, Capablanca, and proceed in order of their title holding years.

Game 2 F.Yates-J.R.Capablanca Moscow 1925

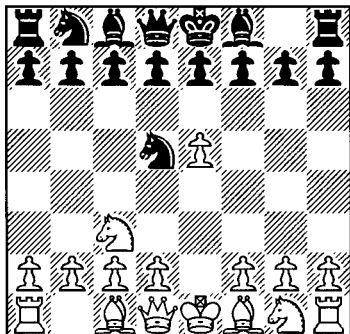
1 e4 ♘f6

Quite a compliment, as the then World Champion takes up his competitor's move (one recalls that Alekhine had introduced his defence to international play in 1921, the same year that Capablanca wrested the world title

Alekhine Alert!

from Dr. Lasker).

2 e5 ♖d5 **3** ♗c3



For some reason this completely harmless move (instead of the natural and stronger 3 d4) has been played repeatedly against World Champions – to no effect! Instead of trying to take advantage of Black’s adventurous knight, White abandons any hope of opening advantage and simply offers to exchange Black’s daring knight, with an even game.

3...♗xc3

I prefer Alekhine’s 3...e6 (see Game 65), but Capablanca no doubt preferred the clarity of the direct capture, as well as White’s doubled pawns.

4 dxc3 d5

For the good alternative 4...d6 see Basman-Smyslov (Game 6) and Nezhmetdinov-Spassky (Game 9).

5 ♖f3 **c5** **6** ♗f4 ♗c6 **7** ♗d2 ♗g4 **8** 0-0-0 **e6** **9** h3 ♗xf3 **10** gxf3 ♗c7

Black has equalized and the advanced white e-pawn is a target.

11 ♗g3 **c4** **12** f4 **g6** **13** ♖b1 **h5** **14** ♗h4 ♗e7 **15** ♗g5?

Correct is 15 ♗xe7 ♗xe7 16 h4 ♗c5 (if 16...♗f5 17 ♗h3 ♗xh4 18 ♗xe6 and White equalizes right away – which would be a success for Yates here) 17 ♗h3 0-0-0. Now if White plays circumspectly and takes off the black knight if it should ever come to f5, he might make a draw – hurrah!

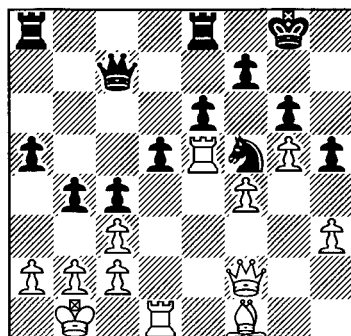
15...♗xg5 16 fxg5 ♗xe5

A pawn up, it’s time for Capa to give a lesson.

17 ♗e3 0-0 **18** ♗e2 ♗c6 **19** f4 ♗e7 **20** ♗hg1 ♗f5

The knight reaches this key square, undisturbed by the white bishop.

21 ♗f2 ♗fe8 **22** ♗ge1 **b5** **23** ♗f1 **a5** **24** ♗e5 **b4!**

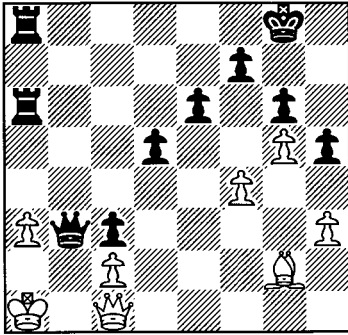


The doubled pawns provide a convenient lever for a line opening attack – while White has no such counterplay on the opposite wing.

25 ♗e1 ♗eb8 **26** ♖a1 ♗b6 **27** ♗d2 ♗ab8 **28** ♗b1 ♗d6 **29** ♗g2 ♗b5 **30** cxb4 **c3!** **31** bxc3 ♗xc3 **32** ♗b3 axb4 **33** a3 ♗a6 **34** ♗e3 ♗ba8 **35** ♗exc3 bxc3 **36** ♗c1 ♗c5 **37** ♖a2 ♗c4 **38** ♖a1 ♗xb3! 0-1

Capablanca finishes with his usual

elegance. White has to take the queen, but then Black's rooks lay waste to the remains of White's king position:



39 cxb3 ♖xa3+ 40 ♔xa3 (or 40 ♖b1 ♖a1+ 41 ♖c2 ♖8a2+ and Black wins) 40...♖xa3+ 41 ♖b1 c2+ 42 ♖xc2 ♖a2+ and Black emerges with an extra rook. Again we see an unprepared opponent who is first baffled by Alekhine's Defence, and then basically lost (with White) by move 15.

Game 3 E.Sergeant-A.Alekhine Hastings 1925/26

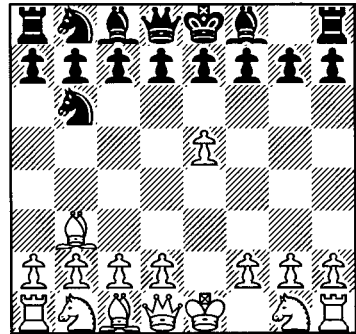
1 e4 ♘f6

It virtually goes without saying that Alexander Alekhine is the hero of this chapter, and indeed of the entire book: he was the first world-class player to recognize that Black could counter-attack with a piece on move one – and try this radical idea out in practice:

2 e5 ♘d5 3 ♙c4 ♘b6 4 ♙b3

White only scores 45% from this po-

sition (note that all such statistics in this book are from the *MegaBase 2008* and my 2009 updates of same). Clearly manoeuvring a bishop to b3, where it will soon be corralled by the knight on b6 and blocked by a black pawn on e6, is hardly a threat to Alekhine's Defence, but like many such weak moves this is still played today.



4...c5

Simplest is 4...d5, as I recommend in Game 68, note to White's third move.

5 d3 ♘c6 6 ♘f3 e6 7 ♘c3 d5 8 exd6

Otherwise it's hard to see what the bishop is doing on b3, but now White has exchanged his advanced centre pawn and received nothing in return.

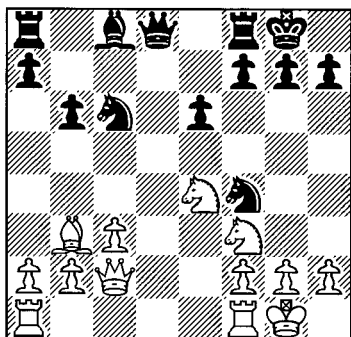
8...♙xd6 9 ♘e4 ♙e7 10 c3 0-0 11 ♙e3 ♘d5!

No retreat! Black sees that he recovers his pawn.

12 ♙xc5 ♘f4 13 0-0 ♙xc5 14 ♘xc5 b6 15 ♘e4 ♘xd3 16 ♔c2 ♘f4

Black has reached a good Sicilian pawn structure (imagine Black has succeeded in engineering a ...d6-d5 break in an open Sicilian position). In other

words, Black has the only centre pawn and potential play down the c-file. For the moment, White has more active pieces, but unless that activity is translated into something more tangible, Black will be at least equal.



17 ♖fd1 ♜c7 18 ♘d6 ♙g6

White's next releases the tension too early.

19 ♘xc8

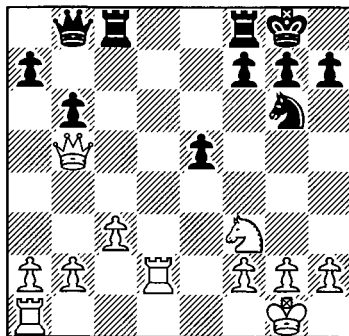
Better is 19 ♖d2 ♙b7 20 ♖ad1 ♖ad8 21 ♘g5 ♜e7 22 ♘ge4 ♘ce5 23 ♘xb7 ♖xd2 24 ♜xd2 ♜xb7 when White retains activity, while Black will plan something like ...h7-h6, ...♖c8 and ...♘c4, or challenge the d-file if possible – the chances would then be approximately balanced.

19...♖axc8 20 ♜e4 ♘a5

A modern player recognizes the Sicilian themes here – one could say Alekhine was ahead of his time, while Sergeant was out of his depth!

21 ♙a4 ♜b8 22 ♙b5 ♘b7 23 ♖d2 ♘d6 24 ♜b4 ♘xb5 25 ♜xb5 e5

The only centre pawn makes a dramatic entrance!



26 ♖ad1 e4 27 ♘g5??

In unfamiliar territory, it's easy to make a mistake. 27 ♘d4 holds on to his material, but after 27...♖c5 Black has good play in the centre and on the kingside, where a pawn majority attack may ensue with ...f5-f4.

27...♖c5 0-1

But now it's all over, as a piece goes.

Game 4 G.A.Thomas-M.Euwe Nottingham 1936

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3

White plays the best line!

4...♙g4

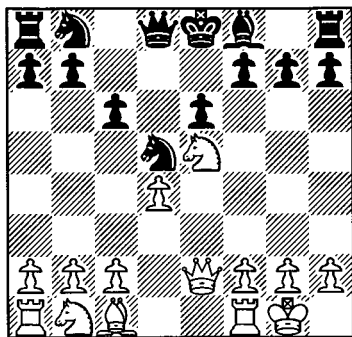
This used to be Black's main reply, but has now been superseded by the modern 4...dxe5, which is also my recommendation.

5 ♙e2 c6 6 0-0 dxe5

6...♙xf3 7 ♙xf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 is supposedly correct (this was also played at Nottingham in the game Botvinnik-Flohr), but I don't like Black's

game – see Game 11, note to Black's 4th move.

7 dxe5 exe2 8 we2 e6



A very modern structure, often seen today in the Caro-Kann and Scandinavian, but here Black is rather behind in development.

9 b3 d7 10 c4 d5f6 11 c3 b4 12 b2 0-0 13 fd1? !

The wrong rook! Correct is 13 ad1 a5 14 d3 ad8 15 f4 ! – White needs the rook behind this advance. As Alekhine correctly notes in the tournament book, White would then have the advantage and good attacking chances.

13... wc7 14 d3 fd8 15 ad1 f8 16 e4 xe4 17 we4 d6 18 d5

18 f4 d7 19 we2 is still somewhat better for White.

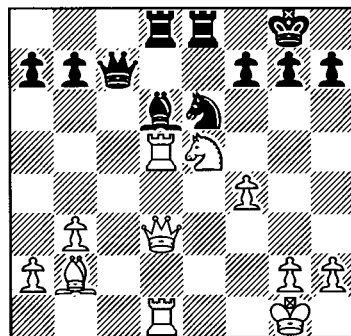
18... exd5

As Alekhine points out, Black could fall into a trap here: 18... cxd5 19 cxd5 wc2? 20 xf7 ! and White wins due to 20... xf7 21 ff3+ with a fatal discovered attack on the queen.

19 cxd5 e8 20 f4 cxd5

20... f6 pays too much to “win” the piece: 21 dxc6 c5+ 22 h1 fxe5 23 cxb7 ab8 24 xe5 wf7 (White wins the piece back after both 24... xb7 25 wc4+ wf7 26 wxc5 and 24... xb7 25 wc4+) 25 wd5 b6 26 wxf7+ xf7 27 xb8 xb8 28 g4 and White's rook and two pawns are much better than Black's minor pieces.

21 xd5 ad8 22 d3 e6??



The reigning world champion leaves a piece en prise!

Alekhine gives 22... c5+ 23 h1 e6 as better for Black, but after 24 f5 xd5 25 wxd5 f4 26 wd2 h5 (26... xe5 27 wd8+ is just as bad) 27 wg5 wins for White.

Instead, Black should play 23... xd5 ! 24 wxd5 g6 25 g3 when White is only slightly better.

23 g3??

There is no reason not to take: 23 xd6 xd6 24 wxd6 d8 25 d7 and now Black could resign or try any of these losing variations:

- a) 25... wc8 26 f5 with f6+ coming.
- b) 25... wa5 26 we7 h6 27 f5 wxf5 28

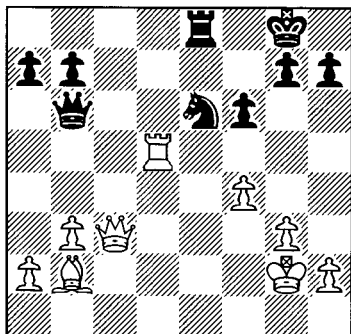
Alekhine Alert!

♟f6+ gxf6 29 ♖xd8+ ♜xd8 30 ♜xd8+ ♟g7 31 ♜d4 with a nice extra piece.

c) 25...♜xd6 26 ♖xd6 ♟f8 (26...♟h8 27 ♟e5 is a pretty win) 27 ♟f6+ and White comes out a rook ahead.

But possibly Sir Thomas was hypnotized!

23...♟c5+ 24 ♟g2 ♟b6 25 ♜c3 ♖xd5 26 ♖xd5 f6 27 ♜c4 ♜c6 28 ♟xb6 ♜xb6



29 ♖d2

"The first of a series of indifferent moves, which can only be explained by extreme shortness of time," writes Alekhine.

Better is 29 ♜c4.

29...♟c5 30 ♜c4+ ♟h8 31 ♜d5 h6 32 ♟h3

Since Black is not threatening anything, as Alekhine remarks, 32 ♟a3 ♟e6 33 ♜c4 ♖d8 34 ♟b4 ♖xd2+ 35 ♟xd2 f5 36 ♟c3 ♜e3 37 ♟e5 ♟h7 38 ♜xe6 ♜e2+ with a draw is more logical.

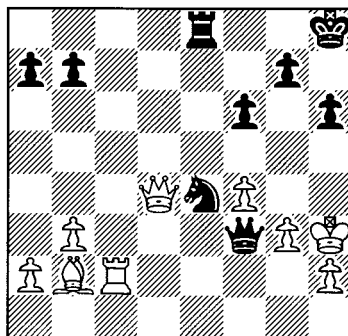
32...♟e4 33 ♖c2

Fritz weighs in here with the silicon centralization 33 ♖d4! and claims that White is still slightly better!

33...♜e3! 34 ♜d4

The greedy 34 ♜xb7 allows a Black attack after 34...♜f3, but the simple 34 ♜h5, holding f3, probably draws.

34...♜f3!



Black sets up the well-known queen + knight attacking machine; neither man nor machine can see a defence for White any longer.

35 ♜g1

A typical attack might run like this: 35 b4 g5 36 b5 ♜f1+ 37 ♟g4 h5+ 38 ♟f5 (or 38 ♟xh5 ♜h3+ 39 ♟g6 ♜h7 mate) 38...♜h3+ 39 ♟g6 ♖g8+ 40 ♟f7 (40 ♟h6 ♜f5 41 ♜xe4 ♖g6+! also wins) 40...♖g7+ 41 ♟f8 ♜e6 and mates next.

35...h5

35...♟g5+ 36 fxg5 ♜f5+ is quicker.

36 ♟d4 ♖d8 37 ♜e3 0-1

White resigns in view of the coming 37...♟g5+ 38 fxg5 (or 38 ♟h4 ♜g4 mate) 38...♜f5+ 39 ♟g2 ♜xc2+, when Black has a material advantage and a raging attack.

Certainly a lucky win by the World Champion, but one sees modern ideas developing in the Alekhine, notably the exchange on e5 which is now standard.

Game 5
N.Bakulin-D.Bronstein
Moscow 1961

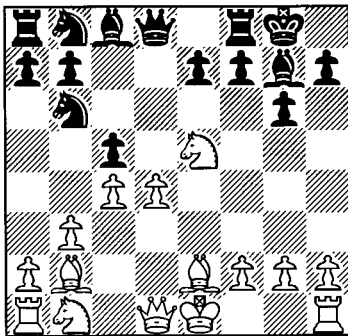
1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 g6

The problem with this move – which became known as the Albut variation – is Short's attack with 5 ♙c4 that I will discuss in the notes to Game 11.

5 c4 ♘b6 6 b3

This looks like some wacky over the board concoction: White has no king-side development and now weakens the long diagonal – it's evident that he has been surprised by the opening.

6...♙g7 7 ♙b2 0-0 8 ♙e2 dxe5 9 ♘xe5 c5!



Breaks and shmakes! We now have a Kengis structure and this thrust, accentuating the power of the g7-bishop, is thematic and strong.

10 f4

White can't keep his centre together: 10 d5?! e6 11 d6 ♘6d7 12 f4 ♘xe5 13 fxe5 ♘c6 and Black wins a

pawn by means of this classic undermining manoeuvre; or 11 dxe6 ♙e7 12 0-0 (not 12 exf7+? ♚xf7 and Black wins due to the pin on the long diagonal) 12...♙xe6 with a big lead in development..

Somewhat better is 10 dxc5 ♙xd1+ 11 ♙xd1 ♘6d7 12 f4 ♘c6 13 ♙f3 ♘cxe5 14 fxe5 ♘xe5 15 ♙e2 ♚d8 when White maintains material equality, but still stands worse in view of his vanished centre (now occupied by a big black knight!) and doubled pawns.

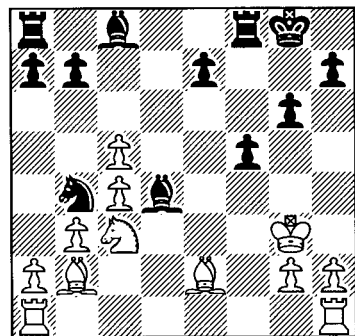
10...♘c6 11 dxc5

Pushing the d-pawn still fails: after 11 d5 ♘xe5 12 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 13 fxe5 ♘d7 14 e6 fxe6 15 dxe6 ♘e5 16 ♙d5 ♙a5+ 17 ♘d2 ♘c6 18 ♚f1 ♚d8 19 ♙g5 ♙xe6 the position begins to look like a Chinua Achebe novel ("Things Fall Apart"!).

11...♙xd1+ 12 ♙xd1 ♘d7 13 ♘c3 ♘dxe5 14 fxe5 ♙xe5

White's centre is only a memory and Black is already better.

15 ♙e1 ♘b4 16 ♙f2 ♙d4+ 17 ♙g3 f5!



Black attacks ferociously sans

Alekhine Alert!

queen!

18 ♖a4 f4+ 19 ♜f3 ♙e3 20 ♜hd1 h5 21 h3 e5 22 ♖c3 ♖c2 23 ♖e4

White has to give up material as Black is ready to mate! If 23... ♜ab1, 23... ♖d4+ 24 ♙e4 ♙f5+ 25 ♙xe5 ♜ae8+ 26 ♙d5 ♜d8+ 27 ♙e5 ♖c6 mate would have been a perfect finish.

Now the game is prolonged, but Bronstein still succeeds in winning in his inimitably imaginative style.

23... ♖xa1 24 ♙xa1 ♙f5 25 ♜d6

25 ♙xe5 ♙xe4+ 26 ♙xe4 ♙xc5 would be more of a technical exercise.

25... ♜ae8 26 ♙c3 g5! 27 ♙d3

Not 27 ♖xg5? e4+ 28 ♖xe4 ♙xe4 mate.

27... g4+ 28 ♙e2 ♙xc5!! 29 ♖xc5 e4

Looks like Empire of the Ants!

30 ♙c2

Another way to lose is 30 ♖xe4 gxh3 31 gxh3 ♙xe4 32 ♙xe4 ♜xe4+ 33 ♙f1 ♜e3.

30... f3+ 31 ♙f1

Black wins after 31 gxf3 exf3+ 32 ♙d1 (or 32 ♙d2 ♜e2+) 32... f2 and the soldier ant becomes a queen.

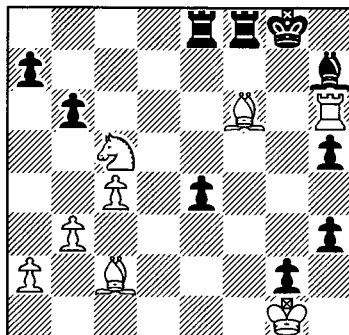
31... gxh3 32 ♜h6

Neither pawn capture works: 32 gxh3 ♙xh3+ 33 ♙f2 e3+ 34 ♙g3 ♙f5 and the ants sweep everything before them while White has no counterplay, or 32 gxf3 h2 33 ♙g2 exf3+ 34 ♙xh2 ♜e2+ 35 ♙g3 ♙xc2 and Black wins material while still retaining a mighty passed pawn.

32... fxg2+

Now that's a pawn majority!

33 ♙g1 ♙h7 34 ♙f6 b6!



A simple but powerful move that ends the game: Black breaks the cohesion of White's pieces, and ultimately White cannot stop the invasion of a black rook.

35 ♖d7

35 ♖xe4 ♙xe4 36 ♜h8+ ♙f7 ends White's play, or 35 ♖a4 ♜e6 and the black rooks rule.

35... ♜f7 36 c5

If 36 ♖e5 ♜xe5! and the remaining rook gets to f1.

36... ♜xd7 37 b4 ♜e6 38 ♙b3 ♙f8!

With single-minded intensity, Bronstein aims to get a rook to the eighth to support his passed pawn – nothing else matters.

39 ♙h2

Or 39 ♙xe6 ♜d1+ 40 ♙h2 g1♙+ 41 ♙xh3 ♙e3+ 42 ♙g2 ♙f3+ 43 ♙h2 ♜h1 mate.

39... ♜xf6 40 ♜xf6+ ♙g7 41 ♜f4 0-1

White resigns in view of 41... e3 42 ♜f3 e2 43 ♜e3 ♜d1!, when the black rook reaches the eighth and one or two black pawns promote.

A spectacular win by Bronstein, but once again we see a high ranked White opponent struggling in the opening.

Game 6
M.Basman-V.Smyslov
Lugano Olympiad 1968

1 e4 d6

1...e5 2 dxc3 dxf6 3 dxf3 dxe4 4 dxc3 dxc3 5 dxc3 f6 is the always entertaining Boden-Kieseritzky Gambit. Basman may have been hoping for something like this, but as we'll see, Smyslov dashes his hopes and heads for the ending – the World Champion's forte.

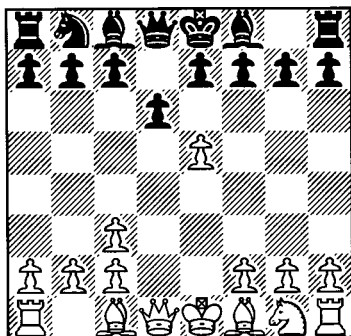
2 e5 d5 3 dxc3

This didn't work against Capablanca (or Taylor, for that matter, see Game 67!), but let's see how Smyslov handles it.

3...dxc3

Alekhine's move is 3...e6 and...

4 dxc3 d6



...Capablanca's move is 4...d5, but Smyslov doesn't need to imitate any-

one.

5 dxc4 d6

Or 5...dxe5?? 6 dxf7+.

6 dxf3 dxe5 7 dxe2

Or 7 dxd8+ dxd8 8 dxe5 f6! as in Game 9, Nezhmetdinov-Spassky, where we get to see this variation crash and burn one more time!

7...e6

Presumably White was expecting 7...f6 8 e3 e6 9 d4 with colourful Boden-Kieseritzky play, but Smyslov adroitly sidesteps: Black gives back the pawn and equalizes easily.

8 dxe5 dxe5 9 dxe5 d7 10 g3

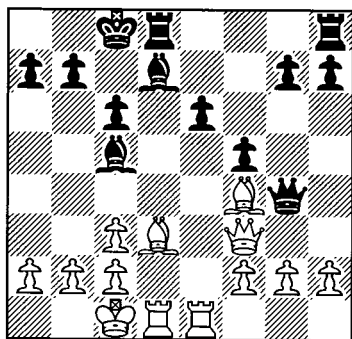
An interesting variation is 10 d5 c6 11 e4 b8 12 b8+ xb8 13 f4 d8 14 0-0-0 f6 15 c7 c8 16 g3 d8 17 he1 (17 c7 with a draw is probably White's best) 17...c8 18 dxd8+ dxd8 19 d1+ d7 20 b4 e7 21 b2 c8 22 a3 g6 23 f4 d8 24 h4 e8 25 dxd8+ dxd8 26 c4 f5 27 xe7+ xe7 28 d3 e5 and Black's better pawn structure gives him the edge.

10...xf6 11 f4 g6 12 f3

Captures give nothing: 12 dxc7 e4+ 13 e2 xc2 and Black has good counterplay, or 12 xg6 hxg6 13 0-0-0 (13 dxc7? c8 wins a piece) 13...0-0-0 is equal.

12...0-0-0 13 a6 c6 14 d3 f5 15 0-0-0 c5 16 he1 g4!

If Basman hoped to surprise Smyslov, he has failed in that aim and now has to play a complex ending, which is something like chasing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch!



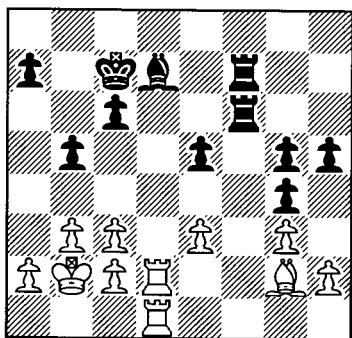
17 ♖xg4 fxg4 18 ♜d2 ♜df8 19 g3 ♜f7

The ending starts out approximately even: Black has the f-file and White doubled queenside pawns, but Black also has a weakness at e6. In short, equal, but by no means drawish.

20 ♙c4

White can play more actively, though after 20 b4 ♙b6 21 ♙b2 ♜hf8 22 ♜ed1 g6 23 ♙c4 ♜e8 24 ♜e2 ♜f5 25 ♜de1 ♜h5 Black has good counterplay.

20...♜e8 21 ♜ed1 b5 22 ♙f1 e5 23 ♙e3 ♙xe3 24 fxex3 ♙c7 25 ♙g2 ♜ee7 26 b3 ♜f6 27 ♜f1 ♜ef7 28 ♜fd1 h5 29 ♙b2 g5



It's hard to see a mistake on White's part, and yet it is equally clear that

Black is gradually obtaining the better game. Looking back, little steps like 26...♜f6 and 27...♜ef7 appear as end-game pointillism, each dot improving Black's game, yet only visible from a distance.

30 c4!?

White feels it too – and lashes out to no avail.

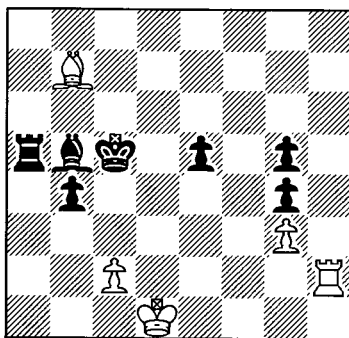
30...bxc4 31 b4 h4 32 ♙c3 h3!

The white h-pawn is now a target.

33 ♙e4 ♙e6 34 ♜d8 ♜d7 35 ♜1xd7+ ♙xd7 36 ♜a8 ♜f2!

Black's potentially passed h-pawn is more advanced and much more dangerous than White's similar a-pawn.

37 ♜xa7+ ♙d6 38 a4 ♜xh2 39 ♙xc4 ♜e2 40 ♙d3 ♜e1 41 b5 cxb5 42 a5 b4 43 ♜b7 h2 44 ♜b6+ ♙c5 45 ♜h6 ♙b5+ 46 ♙d2 ♜e2+ 47 ♙d1 ♜xe3 48 ♙b7 ♜a3 49 ♜xh2 ♜xa5



White managed to get rid of the dangerous passed pawn, but at too high a price: Black emerges with two extra pawns and a winning position.

50 ♜h8

If White goes pawn collecting, Black

wins as follows: 50 ♖h5 ♔d4 51 ♙xg5 ♕c3 52 ♖e1 (not 52 ♙xe5? ♚a1 mate) 52...♙a4 53 ♙xg4 ♕xc2 54 ♙g7 b3 and the b-pawn is too strong.

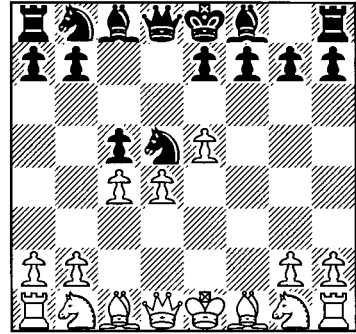
50...♚a3 51 ♔d2 ♙xg3 52 ♙c8+ ♔b6 53 ♙e4 ♙h3 54 ♙g8 ♙h2+ 55 ♔c1 ♙h5 56 ♔d2 ♔c5 57 ♙f5 g3 58 ♙c8+ ♔d6 59 ♔e3 g2 60 ♔f2 ♙c6 61 ♙g8 ♙h1 0-1

White resigns, for if 62 ♙g6+ ♔e7! (62...♔c5 63 ♙xc6+ allows White to prolong the game) 63 ♙xg5 ♙f1+ 64 ♔e2 g1♙ and Black comes out a rook up.

A magical ending by Smyslov, and yet another non-threatening opening for White.

(and a well-centralized knight at that) and an attack in the centre.

6 c4?



White's centre is crumbling and this move doesn't help. 6 ♔f3 is considered best, for which see Game 63. If 6 dxc5 then simply 6...♙a5+ and ...♙xc5, when White will struggle with his sole central survivor, the now weak and isolated e-pawn.

6...♔b4

If I were a GM playing a World Champion in an Interzonal tournament, I would try really hard to still be in the game with White (!) after six moves ...but in fact, here Tal is already clearly better. What is this witchcraft?

I can only surmise that the Colombian GM was surprised by the Alekhine, had nothing ready, and improvised into disaster. However, one must give Zapata some credit: he did dare to push his e-pawn forward on move two! In a later game in this book (Todocevic-Tal, Game 72) Tal's opponent was so terrified of the mighty Alekhine that he answered with the pitiful 2 d3, and was

Game 7

A.Zapata-M.Tal

Subotica Interzonal 1987

1 e4 ♔f6 2 e5 ♔d5 3 d4 d6 4 f4

If White wants the Four Pawns Attack, then he should go for the gusto and play 4 c4 ♔b6 5 f4, and at least a double-edged game will ensue (see Chapter Six). This half-hearted – or three-quarter-hearted – semi-variation is just more debris lying about the Alekhine. Tal gives the line the respect it deserves: not much!

4...dxe5 5 fxe5

White has done terribly after 5 dxe5 ♙f5; e.g. 6 c4 ♔b4 7 ♙xd8+ ♔xd8 and Black was already better in J.Morrison-E.Colle, Scarborough 1926.

5...c5

Black has the only developed piece

Alekhine Alert!

dispatched rather more quickly than in the present game.

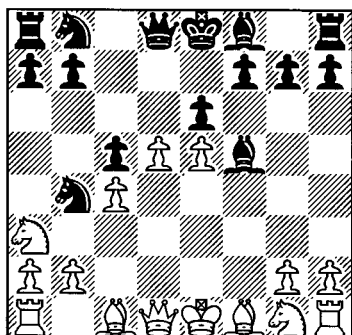
7 d5

Evidently this was White's idea, but the pawns will be quickly undermined and destroyed. If 7 a3!? ♖4c6 8 d5 ♜xe5 wins a pawn, so necessary is 8 dxc5 ♜xd1+ 9 ♙xd1 ♜xe5 with advantage to Black due to his healthy king-side pawn majority, as in Bronstein's great win (Game 5).

7...♙f5

A common Alekhine theme: the b1-knight is forced to a3, where it occupies a poor square, solely defensive in nature – and simply by being there, self-blocks the a-pawn which is unable to drive the attacking black knight out of White's territory.

8 ♖a3 e6



It's clear now that White's centre pawns have been lured forward to their doom.

9 ♜a4+

9 d6 and 9 dxe6 both lose to 9...♜h4+.

9...♜d7 10 ♜xd7+ ♜xd7 11 ♜f3

If 11 dxe6 ♜xe5 12 exf7+ ♙xf7 and

Black's huge lead in development tells us White is not long for this world.

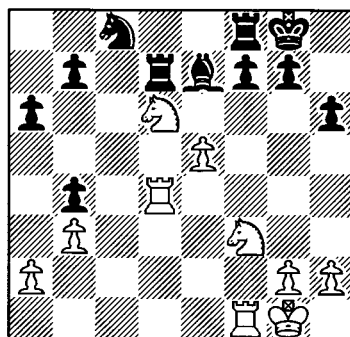
On the other hand, the text just loses a pawn for nothing.

11...exd5 12 cxd5 ♜xd5

A 2500+ GM has just lost a clear pawn, with White, in twelve moves. One has to ask again: would this happen in any other opening?

From this point to the end, Tal offers a fine example of endgame technique, which is quite instructive – but he certainly didn't have to work very hard in the opening!

13 ♙c4 ♜7b6 14 ♙b5+ ♙d7 15 0-0 ♙xb5 16 ♜xb5 a6 17 ♜c3 h6 18 ♜e4 ♙e7 19 b3 0-0 20 ♙a3 ♜b4 21 ♙xb4 cxb4 22 ♜ad1 ♜ad8 23 ♜d6 ♜d7 24 ♜d4 ♜c8!!



Fabulous technique! The knight on d6 (White's only good piece) must be removed, and Tal gets right to it – even though at first sight his move looks impossible as his rook is hanging on d7.

25 ♜e4

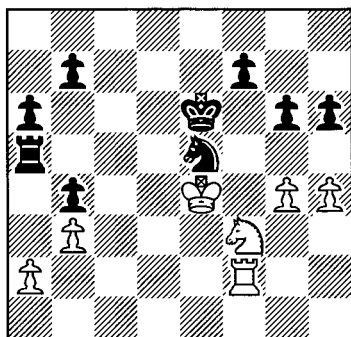
An amazing Tal trick appears if White takes on c8: 25 ♜xc8 ♙c5! 26

♖d6 f6! (Alekhine undermining works even in the ending) 27 ♖c1 ♗xd4+ 28 ♗xd4 fxe5 29 ♗4f5 ♖h7! and White has no defence to ...g7-g6, winning material.

Also bad is 25 ♖fd1 ♗xd6 26 exd6 ♖fd8 27 ♖xb4 ♗xd6 28 ♖xd6 ♗xd6 and Black has a clean extra pawn.

25...♖fd8 26 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 27 ♖c1 ♗a7 28 ♖f2 ♗c6

By virtue of his great 24th, Tal has eliminated any White counterplay and now proceeds gradually to realize the extra pawn – in patient Petrosian style! 29 ♗c5 ♗xc5+ 30 ♖xc5 ♖f8 31 ♖e3 ♖e7 32 ♖e4 ♖e6 33 h4 g6 34 ♖c2 ♖d5 35 ♖f2 ♖a5 36 g4 ♗xe5



Another pawn falls.

37 ♗d4+ ♖e7 38 g5 hxg5 39 hxg5 ♗d7 40 ♗f3 ♗c5+ 41 ♖e3 ♗e6 42 ♖g2 ♖c5 43 ♖e4 ♖f5 44 ♖g4 a5 45 ♖e3 b5 46 ♖g2 ♖c5 47 ♖e4 ♖f5 48 ♖g4 ♗d6 49 ♖g2 a4 50 ♖d2+ ♖e7 51 ♖g2 ♖c5 52 ♗e5 ♖c3 53 ♖g4 axb3 54 axb3 ♖xb3

And another...

55 ♗d5 ♖b1 56 ♗c6+ ♖f8 57 ♗xb4 ♗xg5! 0-1

Three!

Most of the game consisted of the technical exploitation of a material advantage and was quite instructive in that regard. About the opening, one can only marvel at the appalling junk that is thrown at Alekhine's Defence!

Game 8

J.Fernandez-T.V.Petrosian

Las Palmas 1980

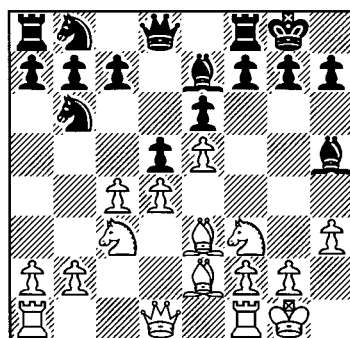
1 e4 ♗f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3

White plays strongly in the opening (for a change!).

4...♗g4

Petrosian follows Euwe, but I recommend Carlsen's 4...dxe5.

5 ♗e2 e6 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 c4 ♗b6 8 h3 ♗h5 9 ♗c3 0-0 10 ♗e3 d5



11 cxd5

This gives White some advantage, but the space-grabbing 11 c5 is the critical move: after 11...♗xf3 12 gxf3 Black has scored terribly in recent years. Here's a real debacle (and I'll show a similar one later in Game 11):

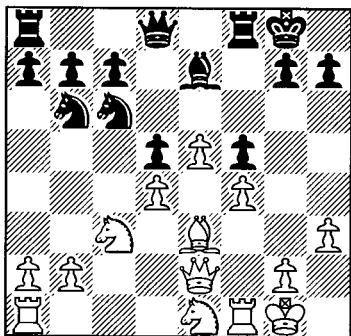
Alekhine Alert!

12...♖c8 13 f4 ♘c6 14 b4 a6 15 ♖b1
 ♘b8 16 ♙d3 f6 17 ♕h2 ♜e8 18 ♚g1 f5
 19 a4 b6 20 ♜b3 ♕h8 21 b5 bxc5 22
 dxc5 ♘d7 23 ♘xd5 exd5 24 ♜xd5 ♘a7
 25 b6 ♘xc5 26 bxa7 ♘xd3 27 ♜xd3
 ♜xa4 28 ♜d4 ♚ac8 29 ♖b7 ♙b4 30 ♜c4
 1-0 K.Van der Weide-J.Ritscher, Ham-
 burg 2007.

11...exd5 12 ♘e1

It might be a mistake to exchange the light-squared bishops, as it's hard to mobilize the kingside pawns later without the bishop's support. I would prefer the very sharp 12 g4!? ♙g6 13 ♘e1 f5 14 ♘d3 c6 15 ♘f4 ♜d7 16 ♕h2 ♘a6 17 ♘xg6 hxg6 18 gxf5 gxf5 19 ♙xa6 bxa6 20 ♚g1 f4 when White broke through with the spectacular 21 ♚xg7+!! ♕xg7 22 ♜h5 ♚f5 23 ♚g1+ ♚g5 24 ♚xg5+ ♙xg5 25 ♜xg5+ ♕h7 26 ♙xf4 and finally won this still complicated ending in A.Ornstein-L.Alburt, Reykjavik 1984. I really don't recommend 4...♙g4 for Black at all!

12...♙xe2 13 ♜xe2 ♘c6 14 f4 f5



About all you can say for Black's game is it's not quite as bad as it looks,

and Fritz's initial "decisive advantage for White" evaluation appears over-optimistic. Despite the space and big protected passed pawn, Black has the better bishop, and exchanging it would ease Black's cramp.

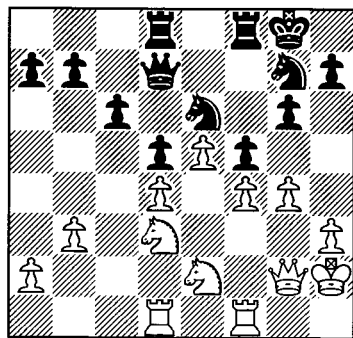
15 ♘d3 ♜d7 16 ♚ad1

White can put Black under serious pressure with 16 b3 ♘d8 17 ♘c5, though I imagine Petrosian would just dig in with 17...♜c8 and wait.

16...♘d8 17 ♕h2 c6 18 g4 ♘e6

Petrosian may have been happy here, as his knight has reached this ideal blockading square; the rest of us might still feel a little worried!

19 ♜g2 g6 20 ♘e2 ♘g7 21 b3 ♚ad8 22 ♙d2 ♘a8 23 ♙b4 ♙xb4 24 ♘xb4 ♘c7 25 ♘d3 ♘ce6



26 g5?!

Strangely enough, the h5-square turns out to be important ...for Black! White has rid himself of the bad bishop but eased Black's cramp, and there may be no advantage to White any more.

Instead, he can keep things under control with 26 ♜g3 b6 27 ♚c1 ♚c8 28

b4 ♖a8 29 ♜e1, but I don't see any way forward for White.

26...♙f7

Over the next several moves, White seems completely to forget that Black's blockading knight also attacks (Nimzowitsch's active blockader!) the white pawns at d4 and f4. Fernandez keeps trying to attack himself (not realizing that White no longer has an attack) – then suddenly realizes he is losing a pawn for nothing!

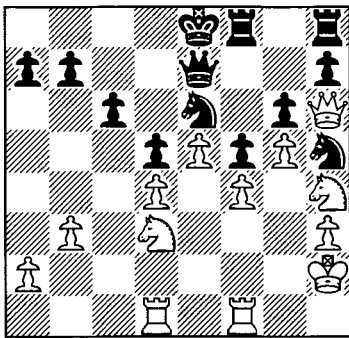
27 ♜f2 ♜h8 28 ♜h4

28 ♜e3 h6 29 gxf6 ♜xh6 30 ♜f3 would be equal, but instead White sends his queen off on an adventure with no good end.

28...♜e7 29 ♜h6 ♜dg8 30 ♜g1

If the queen tries to get back in the game with 30 ♜h4, Black takes over the advantage with the break 30...h6!.

30...♙e8 31 ♜f3 ♜h5 32 ♜h4 ♜f8!



Only Petrosian could win a game in this way: Black has completely consolidated and now the white f- or d-pawn must drop.

33 b4 ♙d8 34 ♜g2 ♜xd4 35 ♜c5 ♜e6

36 ♜xe6+ ♜xe6 37 ♜e3 ♙c8 38 ♜d4 ♜d8 39 ♜c1 ♙b8

Petrosian walks to the queenside with his king...

40 ♜cd1 ♜d7 41 ♜f1 b6!

...and then attacks on that side! White has no defence.

42 ♜g3 ♜xg3 43 ♙xg3 c5 44 bxc5 bxc5 45 ♜4d2 c4 0-1

I would never want to defend that opening position in my life, but that never bothered the Iron Tiger! I do appreciate the lesson in the art of defence and the well-timed counter-attack!

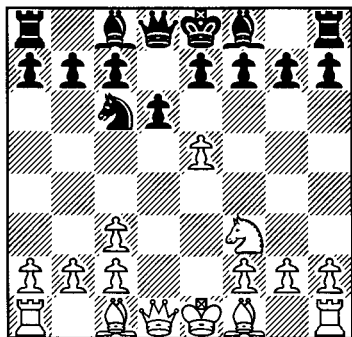
One notices that, objectively, both Euwe and Petrosian, who followed old main lines with 4...♙g4, soon found themselves in worse positions. The Modern must be respected!

Game 9 R.Nezhmetdinov-B.Spassky USSR Championship, Tbilisi 1959

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 ♜c3

It's pretty clear even from our small sample that 3 d4 d6 4 ♜f3 gives White real chances for an advantage, and Black must play very well against this critical line. On the other hand, the move 3 ♜c3 and other assorted second-rate lines give White absolutely nothing or less, as the present game proves once again.

3...♜xc3 4 dxc3 ♜c6 5 ♜f3 d6

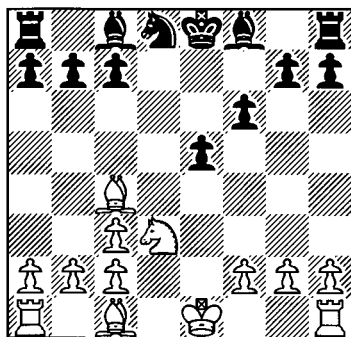


6 ♖c4

6 ♖b5 is better, though Korchnoi handles it smoothly enough: 6...♙d7 7 ♜e2 ♜xe5 8 ♜xe5 dxe5 9 ♜xe5 f6 (the key set-up in this variation: Black establishes himself in the centre) 10 ♜h5+ g6 11 ♜e2 e5 12 ♙e3 ♙d6 13 0-0-0 b6 14 f4 0-0 15 fxe5 ♙xb5 16 ♜xb5 fxe5 17 ♙h6 ♜f7 18 ♜d5 ♜e8 19 h4 ♜d8 20 h5 e4! (one should always remember that the Alekhine is a counter-attacking system, not really a defence – Korchnoi now strikes back with his centre pawn, and includes the trap 21 hxg6? ♙f4+ 22 ♙xf4 ♜xd5 23 gxf7+ ♜xf7 and wins) 21 ♙e3 c6 22 ♜g5 ♜f5 23 ♜g4 ♙c5 24 ♙xc5 ♜xd1+ 25 ♜xd1 bxc5 26 hxg6 hxg6 27 ♜h4 e3! (Black ignores the threat of ♜d8 as his own attack is now quicker – of course 28 ♜d8 now fails to 28...♜f1+) 28 ♜d8 ♜xd8 29 ♜xd8+ ♙f7 30 ♙d1 ♜f2 31 g4 ♙f6 32 ♜d3 ♜d2+!! (White's doubled pawns – the legacy of the unfortunate 3 ♜c3 – are fatal in the pawn ending, as White is too slow in making a passed pawn) 33 ♜xd2 exd2 34 c4 ♙g5 35 c3

♙xg4 36 b4 ♙f3 37 ♙xd2 ♙e4 38 a3 cxb4 39 axb4 (39 cxd4 finally undoubles, but is too late in view of 39...♙d4 winning) 39...g5 40 ♙e2 g4 41 c5 ♙d5 42 ♙d3 g3 0-1 P.Markland-V.Korchnoi, Bath 1973. Black wins after 43 c4+ ♙e5 44 ♙e3 g2 45 ♙f2 ♙d4 46 b5 ♙xc5 47 ♙xg2 (or 47 bxc6 ♙xc6 48 ♙xg2 a5 and the white king is out of the square) 47...cxb5 48 cxb5 ♙xb5 49 ♙f2 ♙b4 50 ♙e2 ♙c3 51 ♙d1 ♙b2 52 ♙d2 a5 and the white king is shut out.

6...dxe5 7 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 8 ♙xe5 f6! 9 ♜d3 e5



After only nine moves one can already evaluate the position in Black's favour: White has no compensation for the doubled pawns, while Black has all the advantages of the Exchange Ruy *without* giving up the bishop pair.

Note that, in the previous game, Petrosian had to defend for about thirty moves before he could claim any advantage.

10 0-0 ♙e6 11 ♙b3 ♙d6 12 ♜e1

White gets nowhere with 12 f4 e4 13 ♜e1 f5 14 ♜e5 ♙xb3 15 axb3 ♙xe5

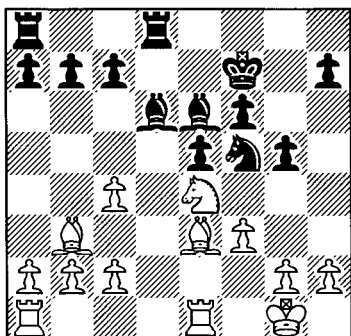
16 fxe5 ♖c6 17 ♙f4 ♜e7 18 g4 g6 19 gxf5 gxf5 20 ♜f2 ♜e6 21 ♖g1 ♖hg8 22 b4 a6 as the e-pawn will drop.

12...g5 13 ♙e3 ♜f7 14 f3 ♖c6 15 ♖f2 ♖hd8 16 ♖e4 ♖e7 17 c4

Rather than blocking this bishop, White should exchange it and hope to draw: 17 ♙xe6+ ♜xe6 18 ♖ad1 when White may be somewhat worse but nothing terrible is apparent.

Nezhmetdinov probably thought that 18 c5 was a strong threat, but Spassky has a surprise for him!

17...♖f5!!



A startling pawn sacrifice: Spassky gives up a pawn to retain both his bishops and take over the initiative.

18 ♙xg5 ♙e7

No exchange! Boris isn't even thinking of 18...fxg5?! 19 ♖g5+ ♜f6 20 ♖e6 ♜e6 21 c5+, when White recovers his pawn with advantage due to his (now) strong bishop and Black's broken pawns.

19 ♙d2 a5

Black is threatening on all fronts; e.g. 20 c5 ♙xb3 21 cxb3 ♙xc5+ 22 ♖xc5

♖xd2 with a typical seventh rank advantage.

20 a4 ♖d4 21 ♙c3 c5

A monster knight...

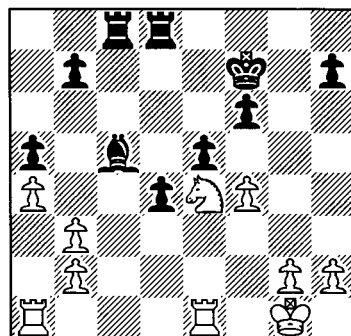
22 ♙xd4

...which White exchanges, but now Black has his (carefully preserved) two bishops.

22...cxd4 23 c5

Or 23 f4 f5 24 ♖g5+ ♙xg5 25 fxg5 e4 and Black has a clear advantage in the centre; in none of these variations is White's extra doubled pawn felt.

23...♖ac8 24 f4 ♙xb3 25 cxb3 ♙xc5



White has finally exchanged the bad bishop on b3, but now Black recovers his pawn while retaining his positional advantage – White has a new set of doubled pawns on the b-file, and Black's central passed pawns are too strong.

26 fxe5 fxe5 27 ♖f1+ ♜e6 28 ♖f3 d3+ 29 ♜f1 ♖d4 30 ♖g5+

Taking the bishop instead doesn't make any difference: the passed pawns are overwhelming.

30...♜d5 31 ♖d1 h6 32 ♖h3 e4 33 ♖f5+

♙e6 34 g4 ♘d6 35 ♙f2 ♚d5 36 ♜f4+
 ♙xf4 37 ♚xf4 ♚c2+ 38 ♙g3 ♙e5 39 h4
 ♚g2+ 40 ♙xg2 ♙xf4 0-1

Once again a weak line is played vs. the Alekhine's Defence; once again Black is better before move 10.

Game 10
D.Suttles-R.J.Fischer
 Palma de Mallorca
 Interzonal 1970

1 e4 ♘f6

While Fischer's dramatic win and draw with Alekhine's Defence against Spassky in their World Championship match are known to all, this less famous win against the Canadian GM Duncan Suttles is an extremely instructive and powerful game:

2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 exd6

The Exchange Variation (see Chapter Five) is often a sign of White's pacifist intentions, but not here. Fischer had played Alekhine's Defence before in the tournament, and so Suttles burned the midnight oil and had come up with a new (for the time) attacking idea.

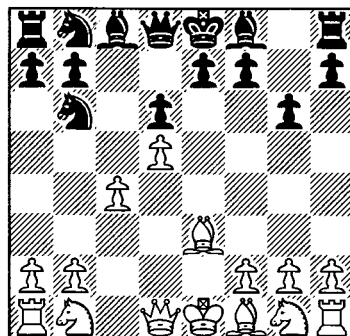
5...cxd6

I would never play this move now, in view of the Voronezh Variation (see Game 38), but at the time there were not 33 moves of "theory" to wade through!

My recommendation is Larsen's favourite 5...exd6, which I will show gives

Black rather easy equality and good chances to play for a win.

6 ♙e3 g6 7 d5

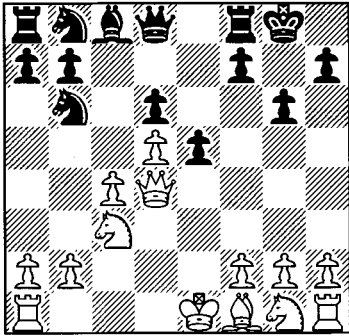


This sets in motion Suttles' not so subtle plan: he wants to play ♙d4, exchange Black's fianchettoed bishop, and then attack the black king, which will presumably be an easy target in view of weak dark squares and no defending minor piece. However, things don't work out quite as planned... We all know that 7 ♘c3 ♙g7 8 ♚c1 0-0 9 b3, the Voronezh Variation, is the dangerous line now – according to present day theory, all Black can hope for (with perfect memorization) is to grovel his way to a draw.

7...♙g7 8 ♙d4 ♙xd4 9 ♚xd4 0-0 10 ♘c3

White plans a straightforward caveman attack with h4-h5, and probably 0-0-0 at some point. This could give White an easy victory – but now Fischer strikes back hard in the centre, and "easy" flies out the window.

10...e5!



A Steinitzian counterblow!

11 ♖d2

If 11 dxe6 Black can sacrifice a pawn with 11...♗c6!; e.g. 12 exf7+ ♔xf7 13 ♖e3 ♔e7 14 ♗e4 d5 15 cxd5 ♙f5 16 f3 ♗xd5 17 ♙c4 ♗cb4 and Black has a tremendous attack for the pawn, while the white king is still stuck in the centre.

11...f5 12 ♗f3

White should consistently go for 12 h4 (recommended by Wade and Blackstock in their excellent tournament book – I wish this chess classic would be reprinted!) as White needs to get his share of play right away; e.g. 12...f4 13 h5 ♙f5 with a double-edged position.

12...♗8d7 13 0-0-0 ♖f6 14 ♖h6 ♖e7 15 ♔e1 e4 16 ♗d2?!

16 h4, as given again by Wade and Blackstock, is still necessary. The white knight was not threatened; the text is slow and lets Black take over the play.

16...♗e5 17 h3 ♗bd7 18 ♖e3

If 18 g4 ♗c5! (not 18...fxg4? 19 ♗cxe4) 19 gxf5 ♙xf5 is much better for Black, as White's d3-square is collaps-

ing, while the black king is perfectly safe.

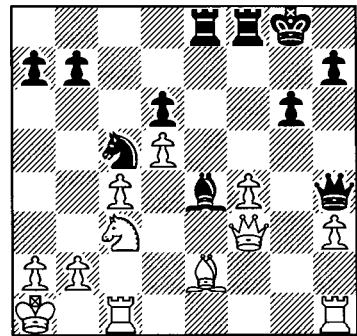
18...♖h4 19 g3

19 f4 exf3 20 ♗xf3 ♗xf3 21 gxf3 ♗f6 22 ♙d3 ♔e8 23 ♖d2 ♙d7 is somewhat better for Black, who can play on the c-file against the king, and also has pressure against White's split pawns on the kingside.

19...♖f6 20 ♙b1 ♗c5 21 f4 exf3 22 ♗xf3 f4! 23 gxf4 ♗xf3 24 ♖xf3 ♖h4!

"Fischer disdains the recovery of the pawn before he is fully mobilized" is a great Wade and Blackstock line.

25 ♙e2 ♙f5+ 26 ♙a1 ♔ae8 27 ♔c1 ♙e4!



White is left with the worse minor piece (the bishop is limited by his own pawns), while the black rooks run all over his position.

28 ♗xe4 ♔xe4 29 ♔h2 ♔xf4

Fully mobilized! Black gets the pawn back with a dominating position.

30 ♖c3 ♖e7 31 ♙f1 ♔e3 32 ♖d2 ♔ef3 33 ♔e2 ♖f6 34 ♙g2 ♔f2 35 ♔ce1 ♔xe2 36 ♔xe2 ♔xc4

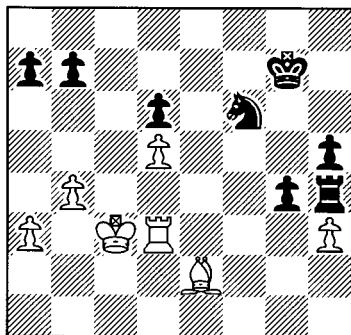
Black's positional superiority has led logically to the gain of a clear pawn.

Alekhine Alert!

37 ♖e3 ♜e5

Black forces a favourable exchange of queens, as 38 ♜xe5?? allows 38...♞c1 mate.

38 ♖b1 ♜xe3 39 ♞xe3 ♞f4 40 ♙f3 h5
41 ♙c2 ♙f7 42 ♙d2 ♞b4 43 ♙c3 ♞h4 44
b4 ♘d7 45 ♙e2 ♘f6 46 ♞f3 ♙g7 47 ♞d3
g5 48 a3 g4



A no-nonsense winning method: Black just makes a passed pawn and finishes the game cleanly.

49 ♙f1

Or 49 hxg4 hxg4 50 ♙d4 ♞h3 51
♞xh3 gxh3 52 ♙f3 h2 53 ♙e3 ♘g4+ 54
♙e2 ♙f6 55 ♙f1 ♙e5 56 ♙g2 ♘e3+ 57
♙xh2 ♘c2 and Black will come out
with two extra pawns – note the help-

lessness of the white bishop here.

49...♘e4+ 50 ♙c2 ♘f2 51 ♞e3 gxh3 52
♞e7+ ♙f8 0-1

A classic Fischer win.

After Fischer, Karpov tried the Alekhine a couple of times, but it didn't suit his style and he soon gave it up. Then the scientific Kasparov, Kramnik and Anand (like the scientific Botvinnik) have not tried a single Alekhine among them.

But I have high hopes for a World Championship match Alekhine's Defence when we see Magnus challenge for the title!

From our Alekhine Repertoire point of view, we can see from these world champion games that the Modern Line (1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3) is really going to challenge us, while "everything else" will not be so difficult. We might even go all Tal on our opponents and win right in the opening!

But before that...

I have devoted the next three chapters of this book to the critical Modern Variation. Pay attention!

Chapter Two

Modern Variation I: The White Pawn Wedge

Our Hero: Vladimir Bagirov

When White plays the Modern Variation (1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3) one of his goals is to maintain a kingside space advantage due to his pawn wedge at e5. This strong pawn interferes with Black's kingside defences (imagine if Black castles kingside, he would not be able to bring a defensive knight to f6) and may prove to be a pivotal factor as White prepares to attack Black's king. Furthermore, said pawn may move forward at any moment, often as an obstructive sac on e6, and this can be extremely dangerous.

I recommend that Black eliminate this pawn wedge as soon as possible: after the above moves, Black can and should play the *immediate* 4...dxe5, when White usually replies 5 ♗xe5 and the pawn wedge is gone. But what if

White takes back with the pawn? Four of my five Alekhine books don't mention this natural move at all; Cox alone at least mentions it – then dismisses it in one sentence.

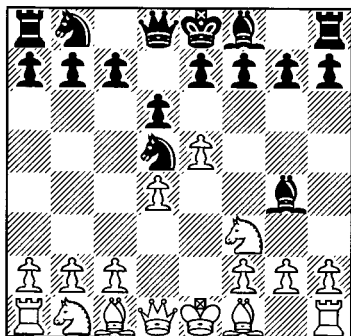
But this line is *extremely* important. If White can capture successfully with the pawn, then the Kengis and Carlsen Variations are done for! So this chapter is devoted to that critical recapture – but before we get there, let's take a look at something *non-critical*: yes, I now introduce a new feature that will surface occasionally throughout this book.

Lines I Don't Like

In this case it's everything *except* 4...dxe5 – let's take a quick look without wasting too much time.

Game 11
N.Short-L.Alburt
 Foxborough
 (3rd matchgame) 1985

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 ♙g4

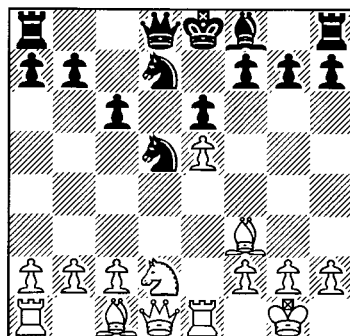


This used to be the main line here, but as Euwe and Petrosian found out (Games 4 and 8), Black's game is by no means easy after this bishop development. White keeps his strong centre pawn and his pressure lasts well into the middlegame.

I don't like any move that doesn't address the central wedge immediately – here are a few other examples:

a) 4...c6 (after this White gets a development tempo, defends his queen and prepares to castle, all while maintaining that pawn wedge) 5 ♙e2 ♙g4 6 0-0 ♙xf3 7 ♙xf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 e6 (one can reach this position via the main game order, i.e. 4...♙g4 5 ♙e2 c6 etc) 9 ♘d2 (this knight manoeuvre to c4 was recommended by Alekhine himself in the Nottingham 1936 tournament

book, where Flohr introduced this variation against Botvinnik) 9...♘d7 10 ♙e1 and White has the strong point at e5 plus the two bishops. Fritz says plus over equals, but I'd give White an even bigger edge – just watch what Anand does to his luckless foe in the next note!



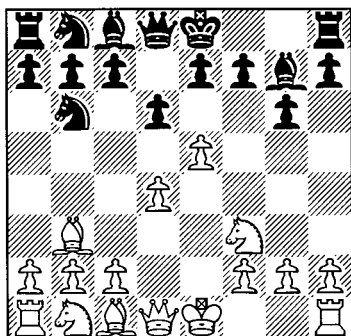
a1) 10...♙e7 11 g3 (the World Champion first sets up, then) 11...♙c7 12 ♙e2 0-0 13 ♙g2 ♙fd8 14 ♘f3 a5 15 h4 (attacks, and) 15...a4 16 a3 b5 17 ♙e4 b4 18 ♘g5 ♘f8 19 axb4 ♘xb4 20 ♙f1 ♙d4 21 ♙e2 h6 22 ♘xf7! (demolishes!) 22...♙xf7 23 c3 ♙d5 24 ♙e4 ♘a6 25 ♙xa4 ♘g6 26 ♙xa6 ♘xe5 27 ♙e4 ♘d3? 28 ♙xd3 ♙xa1 29 ♙xe6+ 1-0 V.Anand-J.Fernandez Garcia, Santurtzi 2003 – yes, that was a GM who couldn't make it to move 30!

a2) 10...♙c7 11 ♘c4 ♘7b6 12 ♙e2 ♘xc4 13 ♙xc4 0-0-0 14 a3 h6 15 b4 g5 16 g3 ♙g7 17 ♙b2 ♙d7 18 ♙e4 h5 19 ♙ad1 g4 20 ♙g2 ♘e7 21 ♙d6 ♘f5 22 ♙xd7 ♙xd7 23 a4 (the strong e-pawn shuts off Black's counterplay, while White attacks on the queenside; Black

now hastens his demise by pawn hunting- ing) 23...♖d5 24 ♜e2 ♜a2 25 ♙c3 ♜a3 26 ♜c4 ♜xa4 27 ♜a1 ♜xc2 28 ♙xc6! (with bishops this strong, you only need one!) 28...bxc6 29 ♜xc6+ ♙b8 30 ♜b5+ ♙c8 (or 30...♙a8 31 ♜d7 and mates) 31 ♜c5+ ♙d8 32 b5! – now it's mate or the queen goes, so 1-0 A.Ivanov- C.Lakdawala, Los Angeles 2000. I can't see any fun in playing a position like this, where the board is cut in two by the white wedge at e5, and Black can only manoeuvre weakly on the wings.

In the same match from which the main game is taken, Alburst also tried the variation named for him – but even though this worked for Fischer once, and Bronstein in Game 5, Alburst had a lot of trouble against the well-prepared Short! Again we see White use the wedge to aid in direct attack – in the first game below, that attack comes very quickly!

b) 4...g6 5 ♙c4 ♘b6 6 ♙b3 ♙g7 and now:

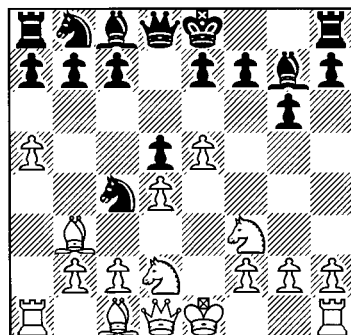


b1) 7 ♘g5 e6 8 ♜f3 ♜e7 9 ♘e4 dxe5 10 ♙g5 ♜b4+ 11 c3 ♜a5 12 ♘f6+

(there are those who may want to defend this position, but I am not among them) 12...♙f8 13 d5 e4 14 ♜g3 ♘d6d7 15 ♘xd7+ ♘xd7 16 dxe6 ♘c5 17 e7+ ♙e8 18 0-0 h6 19 ♙f4 ♘xb3 20 ♙xc7! (now if 20...♜a6 21 axb3! ♜xa1 22 ♘a3 and White has a powerful attack for just one rook, so Alburst tries to make a draw in the ending, but...) 20...♜g5 21 axb3 ♜xg3 22 hxg3 ♙xe7 23 ♘d2 f5 24 ♙b6 a6 25 ♘c4 ♙e6 26 ♙c5+ ♙f7 27 ♘d6+ ♙g8 28 b4 ♜b8 29 ♙a7 ♜a8 30 ♙b6 ♙e5 31 ♜fd1 ♜h7 32 ♜a5 ♙f6 33 ♙d4 ♙xd4 34 ♜xd4 ♜b8 35 ♜e5 ♜e7 36 g4! ♙f8 37 gxf5 ♙xf5 38 ♜xe7 ♙xe7 39 ♘xe4 (...does not succeed: a pawn drops and that myth about rook endings is disproved again!) 39...♙xe4 40 ♜xe4+ ♙d6 41 f3 ♜f8 42 ♙f2 h5 43 ♜d4+ ♙e6 44 c4 ♜c8 45 ♙e3 ♙e5 46 b3 ♜c6 47 ♜d5+ ♙f6 48 c5 g5 49 ♜d7 ♜e6+ 50 ♙d3 ♜e7 51 ♜xe7 ♙xe7 52 ♙c4 ♙e6 53 b5 a5 54 b6 1-0 N.Short-L.Alburst, Foxborough (1st matchgame) 1985.

Two more wins from the same match saw Short throwing in...

b2) 7 a4 d5 8 a5 ♘c4 9 ♘bd2 and:



Alekhine Alert!

b21) 9...b5 10 axb6 ♖xb6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖e1 ♖a6 13 c3 ♖b5 14 e6! (the second advantage of the strong e-pawn is seen here: the powerful advance to e6 – often good as a sacrifice, this time it doesn't even lose a pawn, and Black is essentially finished right here, on move 14, though he succeeds in prolonging the game for some time) 14...fxe6 15 ♖g5 ♖f5 16 ♖xe6 ♖d6 17 ♖c2 ♖f6 18 ♖xg7 ♖xg7 19 ♖f3 ♖c6 20 ♖g5 ♖f7 21 ♖h4 ♖g8 22 ♖g3 ♖d7 23 ♖g5 ♖f6 24 ♖e5 ♖xe5 25 dxe5 ♖f4 26 ♖xh7 ♖a4 27 e6 ♖d6 28 ♖g5 ♖xc2 29 ♖xc2 ♖g7 30 ♖f7 ♖c5 31 g3 ♖f5 32 ♖e5 ♖f6 33 ♖d2 ♖g8 34 ♖f1 ♖f8 35 b4 ♖c6 36 ♖h6 ♖8xf7 37 exf7+ ♖xf7 38 ♖h5 ♖f6 39 ♖h4 e5 40 ♖g4 ♖g7 41 ♖e1 ♖d7 42 ♖g5 ♖f3 43 ♖e3 ♖d1+ 44 ♖g2 ♖f7 45 ♖xg6+ ♖f8 46 ♖g8+ ♖e7 47 ♖g7 ♖xg7 48 ♖xg7+ ♖d6 49 ♖g6+ 1-0 N.Short-L.Alburt, Foxborough (5th matchgame) 1985.

b22) 9...♖xd2 (this was also ineffective) 10 ♖xd2 0-0 11 0-0 c5 12 dxc5 ♖c6 13 ♖c3 e6 14 ♖e1 ♖e7 15 ♖d4 ♖d8 16 c3 ♖c7 17 ♖c2 ♖xa5 (White has maintained the wedge while Black is driven to the wings – now White wins with a kingside attack reminiscent of Ivanov-Lakdawala above; note the powerful dark-squared bishop in both games) 18 h4! ♖c6 19 b4 ♖d7 20 ♖a4 ♖e7 21 h5 ♖xa4 22 ♖xa4 gxh5 23 ♖d1 ♖g6 24 ♖d2 ♖e7 25 ♖e3 a6 26 c6 bxc6 27 ♖c5 ♖b7 28 ♖g5 ♖xe5 29 ♖xe5 f6 30 ♖xh5 fxe5 31 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 32 ♖xe5 ♖g7 33 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 34 ♖xc6

♖g6 35 ♖c7 ♖ac8 36 ♖e5 h6 37 ♖d4 ♖e8 38 ♖xd5+ ♖e6 39 ♖b7 ♖g6 40 ♖d5+ ♖f8 41 b5! (the same winning move as Ivanov played – Black can no longer defend) 41...♖f7 42 ♖d6+ 1-0 N.Short-L.Alburt, Foxborough (7th matchgame) 1985.

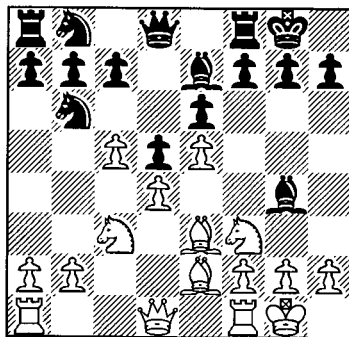
As an attacking player, I love all the above positions ...for White that is! I can't recommend any of them for Black.

Now back to our main game, but is it a main line? It was, but let's keep it in the past tense!

5 ♖e2 e6

5...c6 is the main alternative, as seen via 4...c6 5 ♖e2 ♖g4 above.

6 0-0 ♖e7 7 c4 ♖b6 8 ♖c3 0-0 9 ♖e3 d5 10 c5!



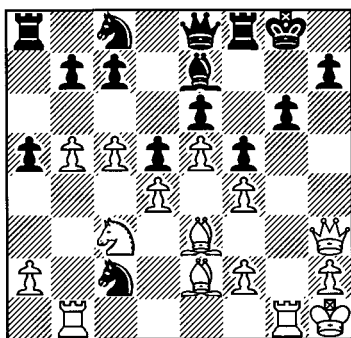
We saw a similar position in Game 8 (with h2-h3 and ...♖h5 thrown in) where White played c4xd5 here. That was fine, but the cramping text is even stronger.

10...♖xf3 11 gxf3 ♖c8 12 f4

It appears that White is playing regular chess, while Black has waited

until now to set up “Fischer random”! White scores 69% from this position; the highest rated champion of this line, our stubborn friend Lev Albut, has scored five losses to one win (and that against someone rated two hundred points below him) and in general I think Black’s game is just plain bad! The sable forces have no space and no counterplay, while White has the big wedge in the centre and the g-file to attack down. *Fritz* is at plus 1.15 already (more than a pawn advantage in mechanical terms), and while I don’t always believe the machine, in this case the evidence is overwhelming: Black has a terrible game – avoid at all costs!

12...♖c6 13 b4 a6 14 ♖b1 f6 15 ♙d3 ♗e8 16 ♗g4 f5 17 ♗h3 a5 18 b5 ♖b4 19 ♙e2 ♖c2 20 ♙h1 g6 21 ♖g1



White’s game is easy to play; Black’s is insanely difficult.

21...♖f7 22 ♙f3 ♙f8 23 ♖b2 ♖a3 24 ♙c1 ♖a7 25 ♙e2 ♗d7 26 ♖d1 ♖d8 27 ♗f1 ♙h6 28 ♖b3 ♖c4 29 ♙xc4 dxc4 30 ♗xc4

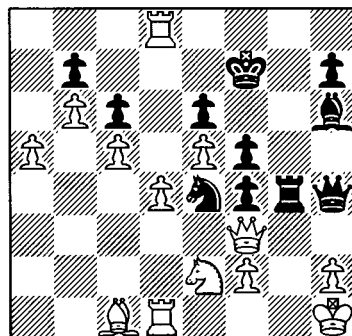
Black was never able to find an out-

post for either of his wandering knights, and now just loses a pawn for nothing.

30...c6 31 b6 ♖c8 32 ♖a3 ♗e7 33 ♗e2

Allowing Black to prolong the game. White could deny any counterplay as follows: 33 ♖g2! ♖g7 (or 33...g5 34 ♖e2 and Black’s kingside play is over) 34 ♖e2 g5 35 fxg5 ♙xg5 36 ♙xg5 ♗xg5+ 37 ♖g3 and wins.

33...♖g7 34 ♖xa5 ♗h4 35 ♗f3 g5 36 ♖a8 gxf4 37 ♖e2 ♖g4 38 a4 ♙f7 39 a5 ♖d6 40 ♖xd8 ♖e4

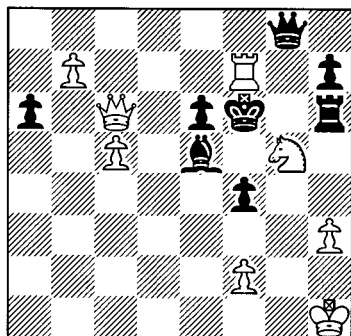


Black has conjured up some amazing counterplay, but it’s still not enough against White’s cramping centre and extra queenside pawn.

41 ♖f1 ♗xd8 42 ♖c3 ♖g5 43 ♗d3 f3 44 ♙xg5 ♙xg5 45 ♗xf3 ♗xd4 46 a6 bxa6 47 h3 ♖h4 48 b7 ♗xe5 49 ♖b1 ♗b8 50 ♗g3 f4 51 ♗f3

White can also win with 51 ♗xg5 ♖xh3+ 52 ♖g1 ♖xc3 53 ♖b4 e5 54 ♗f5+ ♖g7 55 ♗c8 etc.

51...♙d8 52 ♖e4 ♙c7 53 ♖g1 ♖h6 54 ♖g5+ ♙e7 55 ♗xc6 ♙e5 56 ♖d1 ♗g8 57 ♖d7+ ♙f6 58 ♖f7+!



This fine blow ends Albut's heroic resistance, as 58...♙xg5 loses to 59 ♖g2+.

58...♙xf7 59 ♜xf7 ♙xf7 60 ♙g2 1-0

One shouldn't have to suffer so much!

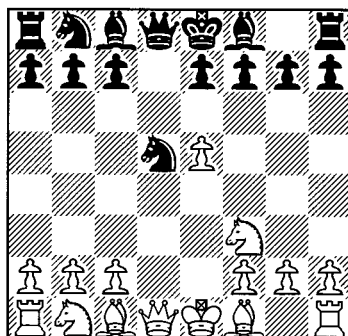
Now on to my recommendation, 4...dxe5, which is critical, Carlsen approved, and the subject of this and the following two chapters.

Game 12 P.Chandler-V.Bagirov Giessen 1994

1 e4 ♟f6

The late Latvian Grandmaster Vladimir Bagirov, the hero of this chapter, was a lifelong Alekhine devotee who played more than a hundred high-level tournament games with his favourite defence. Here he demonstrates precisely how Black should handle this position: losing the right to castle isn't important; immediate counterplay is!

2 e5 ♟d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♟f3 dxe5 5 dxe5



Our friend Mr. *Fritz* considers this a perfectly plausible recapture; the machine even claims it gives White a slight edge. This natural move has been played by strong GMs like Dautov and Belikov, and you could lose to this line in eight moves (if you're careless) or thirteen moves (if you've studied a little bit). You'll see both games in the notes below.

And yet this pawn wedge line is the stealth variation, never before analyzed in any Alekhine book! It's about time, too, as GMs with Black, unprepared, have had a lot of trouble in this line. Alekhine expert Kengis barely drew and Garcia Martinez went down in flames. Once again, I will show these disasters in the notes.

Move order must be precise here: Bagirov will set us on the right path.

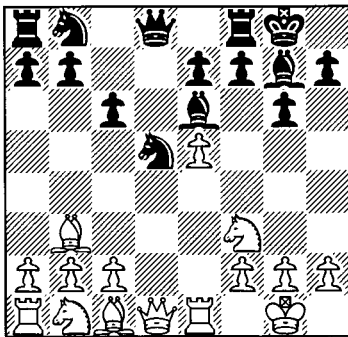
5...♙g4!

The only good move, as the only way to show the dark side of White's pawn capture is to counter-attack said pawn right away. Yes, White can make the

black king move after this, but that's unimportant: if Black can make the white e-pawn a target in the ending (instead of a tower of strength in the middlegame) then his strategy has succeeded.

Every other move that has been tried has serious drawbacks:

a) 5...g6 (Kengis tries his own system, but it doesn't work here: the idea of his line, as we'll see in the next chapter, is that the fianchettoed dark-squared bishop has an effective diagonal and a soft target in the white knight on e5; here the same bishop will be blocked instantly by a pawn, and worse can happen when Black castles kingside) 6 ♖c4 c6 7 0-0 (White could try 7 ♘c3 hoping for 7...♗xc3 8 ♖xf7+ winning the queen, but this is unlikely to work against a grandmaster; Black should just defend with 7...♗e6) 7...♗g7 8 ♖b3 0-0 9 ♔e1 ♗e6



(I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter that one advantage of the white pawn wedge at e5 is that it prevents a black knight from returning to

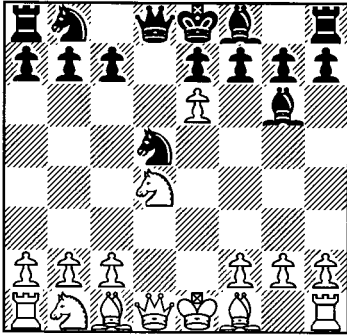
f6 for kingside defence: White has just the position he needs to take advantage of this – correct now is the enterprising queen lift 10 ♗d4! ♖a6 11 ♗h4, when it's unlikely there is any satisfactory defence to White's direct attack, with the immediate ♗g5 threatened, and ♗h6 to remove Black's only kingside defender also in the offing) 10 ♗bd2 (this quiet move is followed by a bold one followed by a draw offer – rather inexplicable to those of us not in the GM club!) 10...♗d7 11 ♗d4! (the typical obstructive sacrifice, seen again and again as a White attacking motif vs. the Alekhine: White gives up a pawn to inflict doubled and self-blocking black pawns on e6 and e7) 11...♗c7 ½-½ R.Dautov-E.Kengis, Baden-Baden 1990. Who knows why the players agreed to a draw here – but if they wanted to fight on, one could imagine a continuation like 12 ♗xe6 ♗xe6 13 ♗xe6 fxe6 14 ♗e2 ♗xe5 15 ♗e4 with a double-edged game where White has compensation for the pawn.

This doesn't clearly favour White, but 10 ♗d4! given in the notes does – Black should avoid 5...g6, as his kingside is just too weak.

b) 5...♗f5 (this time the GM playing Black is not so lucky: he makes this natural move, very common in the Alekhine's – only to discover two things: one, the move is very bad *in this specific position* where White has the strong e-pawn and the square d4 for his knight, and two, the White player is

Alekhine Alert!

not about to show mercy!) 6 ♖d4 ♙g6 7 e6!



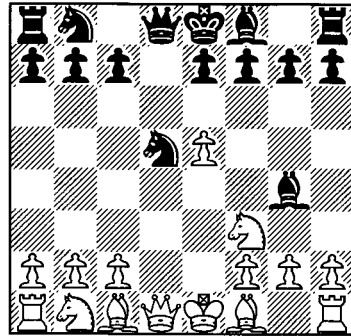
(Black's position is already unpleasant) 7...c6 8 ♙d3 ♜d6 9 exf7+ (the black pawn structure is shattered) 9...♙xf7 10 O-O ♖d7 11 ♙e1 ♖c5 12 ♖a3 ♜f6 13 ♖c4! ♖xd3 (if 13...♜xd4 14 ♖d6+ is brutal) 14 ♜xd3 ♖b4 15 ♜c3 ♖xc2 16 ♙g5! (still trying to divert Black from the d6-square) 16...♜xd4 17 ♜xd4 ♖xd4 18 ♖d6+ ♖d7 19 ♖xf7 ♙g8 20 ♙ad1 c5 21 b4 b6 22 bxc5 bxc5 23 ♙e3 ♙e8 24 ♙xd4 ♖xf7 25 ♙xc5 e5 26 ♙d5! and White won the ending in R.Martin del Campo-S.Garcia Martinez, Havana 1990.

c) 5...♙e6 6 ♖d4! (this knight attack can really be a problem for Black – you could even lose in thirteen moves!) 6...c5 7 ♖xe6 ♜d7! (possibly not the best move, but Black's position is already wrecked) 8 ♙b5! ♖c6 9 ♜xd5! ♜xd5 10 ♖c7+ ♖d8 11 ♖xd5 ♖xe5 12 ♙f4 f6 13 ♖bc3 1-0 E.Cordova-L.Moreno, Lima 2007.

Don't let that knight get to d4 with attack – pin it! This is one of those lines

where the Alekhine player simply has to know that Bagirov's 5...♙g4 is the only good move.

But even after that, you could still lose in eight moves – see the next note!



6 c4

White decides to “punish” his high-rated opponent by depriving him of the castling privilege – but as it turns out, only White feels the pain.

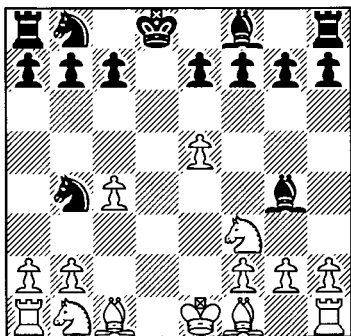
We'll see another way to attack the black knight, 6 ♙c4, in the next game; and the final three games of the chapter deal with the best and critical 6 h3.

Black should have no problems against the mild 6 ♙e2; e.g. 6...e6 (it's good to block the advanced white e-pawn, though 6...♖c6 is also fine and transposes to Game 62 in Chapter Eight) 7 O-O (7 c3 is a trick: 7...♙e7?? 8 ♜a4+ 1-0 E.Belle-E.Zuiderweg, Groningen 2004, is that embarrassing eight move loss; of course if Black blocks the potential check with 7...♖c6 he's fine) 7...♙e7 8 c4 ♖b6 9 ♖c3 ♜xd1 10 ♙xd1 ♖c6 and Black has already reached an equal ending and eventually drew in

A.Sheehan-P.Bevan, Welsh Ch., Ogmore by Sea 1992.

If 6 ♞c3 Black should equalize with the solid 6...e6. Worse is 6... ♞xc3 7 ♞xd8+ ♜xd8 8 bxc3 when, despite the shattered pawns, White has open lines for attacking purposes.

6... ♞b4 7 ♞xd8+ ♜xd8



One sees already that Black's counter-attack is successful. Far from exploiting the black king, White must attend to the threat on c2, and he has no good way to meet it.

8 ♞a3

Probably best, but this typical situation – attacking black knight on b4 vs. passive defending white knight on a3 – occurs repeatedly in the Alekhine, always to Black's advantage (recall this same knight relationship in Game 7, where White didn't make it out of the opening alive). The problem here is that the alternatives are even worse: 8 ♞d4 c5 9 a3 cxd4 10 axb4 ♞c6 and Black forks two pawns, or 8 ♞d1 ♞d7 (exploiting the new pin) 9 ♞e2 ♞c6 10 ♞f4 ♞xf3 11 ♞xf3 ♞dxe5 12 ♞xe5

♞xe5 13 ♞xb7 ♞b8 14 ♞a6 ♞b6 15 ♞b5 c6 and again Black wins a pawn.

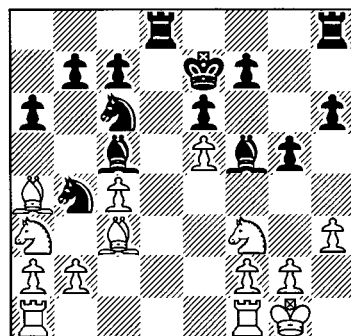
8...e6

The direct 8... ♞xf3 9 gxf3 ♞8c6 is also good, when White had weak pawns across the board and Black eventually won in K.Forman-P.McKeown, British League 2002.

9 ♞g5 ♞e8

The black king moving is not felt, but White's position remains uncoordinated, as the e5-pawn is weak and the a3-knight is misplaced.

10 ♞e2 ♞f5 11 0-0 ♞8c6 12 ♞f3 a6 13 ♞d2 ♞d8 14 ♞c3 ♞c5 15 ♞d1 ♞e7 16 ♞a4 h6 17 h3 g5



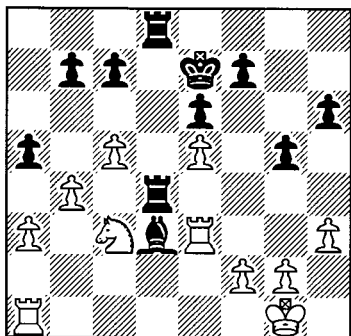
Black is much better: neither white knight has a forward move and the a1-rook is tied down to defence of a pawn! White tries to regroup, but Bagirov does not let him.

18 ♞b1 ♞d3 19 ♞c1 ♞e2 20 ♞e1 ♞d4 21 a3 ♞d3

Both white knights have retreated to the first rank; both black knights have advanced!

22 ♞xd3 ♞xd3 23 ♞d1 ♞e2+ 24 ♞xe2

**♙xe2 25 ♜b4 ♙d4 26 c5 ♜d5 27 ♙xd4
♜xd4 28 ♞c3 ♙d3 29 ♜e1 ♜hd8 30 ♜e3
a5!**



Since 31 ♜bxa5 ♜c4 obviously favours Black, White has to accept a weak pawn at b4.

31 ♜d1 axb4 32 axb4 ♙g6 33 ♜a1

Black also wins a pawn after 33 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 34 b5 ♜c4.

33...♜xb4 34 ♜a7 ♙d7 35 ♜e1 ♙c6 36 ♙a4 ♜d2 0-1

White wisely resigns, a pawn down without a shred of counterplay.

One sees that “making the black king move” does not work for White. By the end of the game, Black’s king had become a strong attacking piece; meanwhile White’s castled monarch accomplished exactly nothing!

Game 13

A. Everet-F. Patuzzo

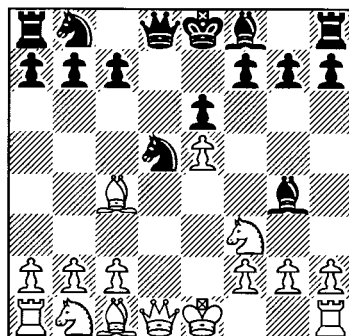
Switzerland vs. Italy
match 1994

1 e4 ♞f6 2 e5 ♞d5 3 ♞f3 d6 4 d4 dxe5 5

dxe5 ♙g4 6 ♙c4

White develops and attacks, but Black has a simple answer.

6...e6



In general, Black should always be equal in this position, with the white e-pawn stopped in its tracks and the light-squared bishop already developed beyond the blocking pawn.

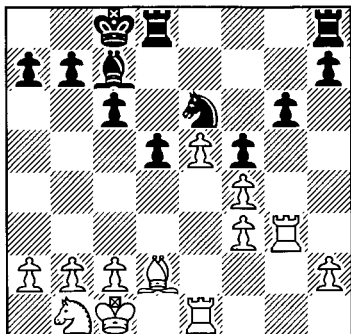
7 ♞c3 ♙b4 8 ♙xd5

A typical “modern” strategy: White takes the pieces off in the opening and plays to draw, even if this means a slight inferiority for him. In this game White succeeds. After the alternative 8 ♙d2 ♞c6 9 ♞xd5 ♙xf3 10 gxf3 (both 10 ♜xf3 ♙xd2+ and 10 ♞xc7+ ♜xc7 11 gxf3 ♜xe5+ are better for Black) 10...exd5 11 ♙b5 ♜h4 Black’s energetic play has given him good counterplay.

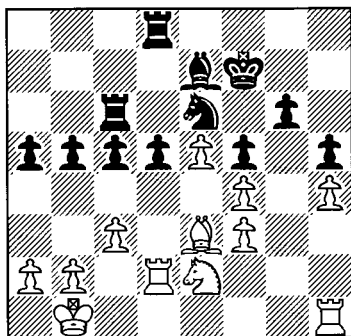
8...♜xd5 9 ♜xd5 exd5 10 ♙d2 ♙xf3 11 gxf3 c6 12 0-0-0 ♞d7 13 ♜hg1 g6 14 ♜de1 0-0-0 15 ♜g4 ♙a5 16 ♞b1 ♙c7 17 f4 f5 18 ♜g3 ♞c5 19 f3 ♞e6

Black has consolidated with a slight edge (the eternally fixed doubled pawns), but White has drawing

chances due to reduced material and the passed e-pawn.



20 h4 ♖b6 21 ♖h1 ♜g7 22 ♜c3 ♔d7 23 ♜g2 ♔e6 24 ♜e2 ♜hg8 25 ♜g3 h5 26 ♜f1 ♔f7 27 ♜e2 ♜e6 28 c3 c5 29 ♜g3 ♜c8 30 ♜f1 ♔d8 31 ♜h2 ♔e7 32 ♔b1 ♜gd8 33 ♜e2 ♜c6 34 ♜d1 b5 35 ♔e3 a6 36 ♜hh1 a5 37 ♜d2



37...♞c7

37...b4 was probably the best winning try: Black needs to create a second weakness.

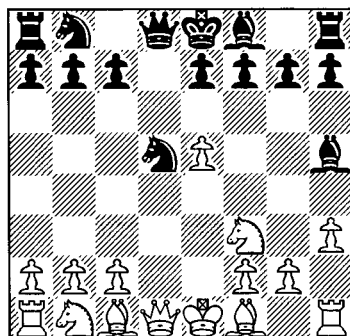
38 a3 ♞cd7 39 ♔f2 d4 40 cxd4 cxd4 41 ♔g3 ♔c5 42 ♜c1 ♔b6 43 ♜d3 ♜c8 44 ♜c1 ♜c4 45 ♔f2 ♜dc7 ½-½

Black has been and still is slightly bet-

ter, but was unable to convert. It's clear that straightforward attacks against the black knight on d5 are ineffective. The dangerous plan is to attack the Bagirov bishop with 6 h3, and that's the subject of the concluding three games of the chapter.

Game 14 W.Bialas-N.Dietrich Detmold 1964

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♜f3 dxe5 5 dxe5 ♔g4 6 h3
Critical and best.
6...♔h5



A natural ...mistake! Black loses piece control of e6. For the correct 6...♔xf3 see the next two games.

7 e6!

A classic obstructive sac that makes Black's game very difficult. One must remember that the e5-e6 advance is a typical attack against the Alekhine.

It is also possible to delay the blow one move: 7 g4 ♔g6 8 e6 f6 and now,

Alekhine Alert!

instead of 9 $\text{N}h4$ when Black made a draw in T.Sakelsek-S.Collins, Budapest 2005, I think 9 $\text{N}c4$ gives White a clear plus as Black is seriously cramped by the wedge at e6.

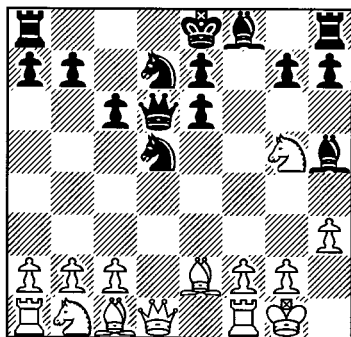
7...fxe6 8 $\text{N}b5+$

8 g4 $\text{N}g6$ 9 $\text{N}e5$ is another annoying possibility for White.

8...c6

If 8... $\text{N}c6$ one can easily imagine Black ending up with doubled pawns on the c-, e- and g-files (after $\text{N}xc6+$ and g2-g4/ $\text{N}e5/\text{N}xg6$).

9 $\text{N}e2$ $\text{Q}d6$ 10 0-0 $\text{N}d7$ 11 $\text{N}g5$

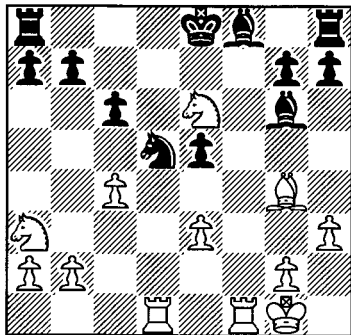


White's attacking position is worth more than a pawn – and what is Black's buried alive king's bishop doing?

11... $\text{N}g6$ 12 $\text{N}a3$ $\text{N}7b6$ 13 $\text{N}g4$ e5 14 $\text{N}e3$ e6?

Giving back the pawn is fatal – the material advantage, devalued as it is, is the only compensation Black has for his uncoordinated position. He can try to defend with 14... $\text{N}xe3$ 15 fxe3 $\text{Q}xd1$ 16 $\text{N}axd1$ and White still has a bind in the ending, but at least Black should make it past move 20!

15 $\text{N}xe6$ $\text{N}xe3$ 16 fxe3 $\text{Q}xd1$ 17 $\text{N}axd1$ $\text{N}d5$ 18 c4 1-0



Move 20 is unreachable: Black resigns in view of 18... $\text{N}xe3$ 19 $\text{N}c7+$ $\text{Q}e7$ 20 $\text{N}d7$ mate, or 18... $\text{N}xa3$ 19 cxd5 $\text{N}d6$ 20 dxc6 $\text{Q}e7$ 21 $\text{N}c7$ $\text{N}xc7$ 22 $\text{N}d7+$ $\text{Q}e8$ 23 cxb7 $\text{N}b8$ 24 $\text{N}xc7$ with an easy win.

Don't allow this sacrifice!

Game 15 T.Yilmaz-C.Horvath Budapest 1992

1 e4 $\text{N}f6$ 2 e5 $\text{N}d5$ 3 d4 d6 4 $\text{N}f3$ dxe5 5 dxe5 $\text{N}g4$ 6 h3 $\text{N}xf3$

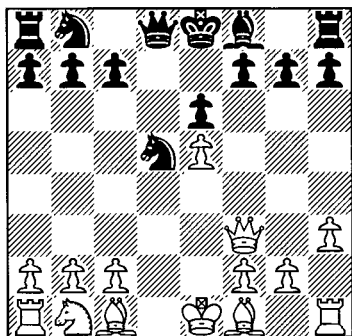
Correct.

7 $\text{Q}xf3$ e6

Black prevents any disruptive sacrifices.

After examining the last three games, I think it's safe to say that this position represents best play by both sides in this pawn wedge variation. White has the two bishops, but the queen is either developed and strong –

or exposed prematurely. White's e-pawn is either advanced and strong, or overextended and weak! In other words, a double-edged position has arisen. Since this position can arise more or less by force if Black plays our repertoire 4...dxe5, then Black should understand this position well.



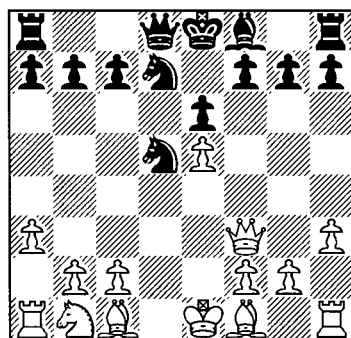
8 ♖e4

White has tried many moves here, but nothing Black can't handle:

a) The direct 8 c4 should not be feared, as White can hardly take on b7, and otherwise Black's knights are activated and d4 is weakened: 8...♖b4 9 ♖e4 (if 9 ♖xb7 ♖8c6 and White has no real defence to the twin threats of ...♜b8 and ...♜c2+, e.g. 10 ♖b5 ♜c2+ 11 ♜e2 ♜2d4+ forks) 9...♜d4 (this spotlights the weakness at d4 in spectacular fashion, but the simple 9...♜8a6 with the idea of ...♜c5 is possibly even stronger) 10 ♖xd4 ♜c2+ 11 ♜d1 ♜xd4 12 ♜d2 (12 ♜f4 might keep things in the equals over plus range) 12...♜bc6 13 f4 0-0-0 14 ♜c3 ♜f5 15 g4 ♜g3 16 ♜g1 ♜xf1 17 ♜xf1 ♜d3 18 ♜e2 ♜xh3

and Black soon won with his extra pawn in J.Kowallik-A.Barthel, Ruhrgebiet 1997.

b) 8 a3 is played most often, but seems too slow: after 8...♜d7 Black has active play. We see Mr. Art of Attack himself, Vladimir Vukovic, trade pawn structure successfully for activity, while Petrosian is unable to defend White's position:



b1) 9 ♖g3 f6 10 exf6 ♖xf6 11 ♖g5 ♖f7 12 ♜e2 ♜e7 13 ♖h5 g6 14 ♖f3 ♜f6 15 c4 ♜e5 16 ♖e4 ♜b6 17 ♜c3 0-0-0 18 ♜e3 ♜c6 19 ♜f3 ♜xc3+! 20 bxc3 ♖f5 (White's two bishops don't compensate for his shattered pawns) 21 c5 ♖xe4 22 ♜xe4 ♜d5 23 ♜h6 ♜a5 24 ♜c2 ♜hg8 25 0-0 ♜xc3 26 ♜fe1 ♜b5 27 ♜a4 ♜c3 28 ♜c2 ♜b5 29 ♜a4 ♜d4 30 ♜ad1 ♜ab3 31 c6 ♜c5 32 cxb7+ ♜b8 33 ♜e3 e5 34 ♜b5 ♜xb5 35 ♜xc5 ♜d4 36 ♜b1 ♜d5 37 ♜e7 ♜e8 38 ♜f6 ♜e6 39 ♜g7 ♜e7 40 ♜f6 ♜e6 41 ♜g7 ♜c2 42 ♜e4 ♜xa3 43 ♜b3 ♜b5 44 f4 ♜xb7 45 ♜xe5 a6 46 ♜c4 ♜c6 47 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 48 ♜f2 a5 49 g4 a4 50 ♜b4 a3 51 ♜a4 ♜d2+ 52 ♜g3 ♜d5 53 g5 a2 54 ♜a8

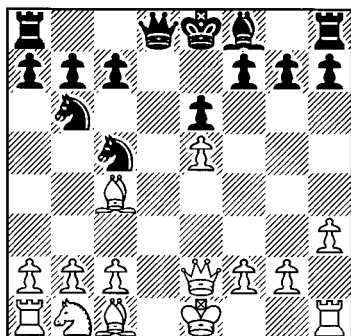
Alekhine Alert!

♖d3+ 55 ♔g4 ♜a3 56 ♜d8+ ♜d6 0-1 L.Asztalos-V.Vukovic, Debrecen 1925.

b2) 9 c4 ♜e7 10 ♜f4 ♜c6 11 ♜g3 ♜d4 12 ♜c3 c5! (it's not like Petrosian to have a hole in his position like this; Black is already somewhat better) 13 ♜d2 ♜c7 14 ♜f3 ♜xf3+ 15 gxf3 0-0-0 16 ♜d3 ♜e7 17 0-0-0 f5 18 h4 ♜b8 19 ♜c2 ♜c6 20 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 21 h5 g5 22 hxg6 hxg6 23 ♜xh8 ♜xh8 (Black wins a pawn in view of the threat ...g6-g5, and Mikenas makes no mistake in the ending) 24 ♜e3 ♜xe5 25 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 26 f4 ♜xc4 27 ♜b3 b5 28 ♜xc4 bxc4 29 ♜c2 a6 30 ♜c3 ♜f6+ 31 ♜xc4 ♜xb2 32 ♜xc5 ♜c7 33 a4 ♜c6 34 f3 ♜c1 35 ♜e7 ♜xf4 36 ♜c5 g5 37 ♜g1 g4 38 fxg4 fxg4 39 ♜d4 ♜c7 40 ♜e4 ♜b6 41 ♜xb6 ♜xb6 0-1 T.Petrosian-V.Mikenas, Tbilisi 1944.

c) 8 ♜g3 is best: White defends e5 and attacks g7, trying to pin down Black's bishop – see the next game.

8...♜d7 9 ♜c4 ♜c5 10 ♜e2 ♜b6



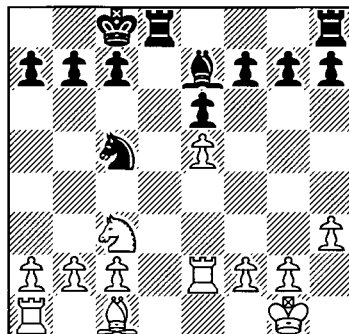
Black's active knights show that White can't keep the two bishops.

11 0-0 ♜xc4 12 ♜xc4 ♜d5

And if the queens come off, then the

advanced e-pawn has no positive virtue and may become weak.

13 ♜e2 ♜e4 14 ♜e1 0-0-0 15 ♜c3 ♜xe2 16 ♜xe2 ♜e7



Black has no problems at all.

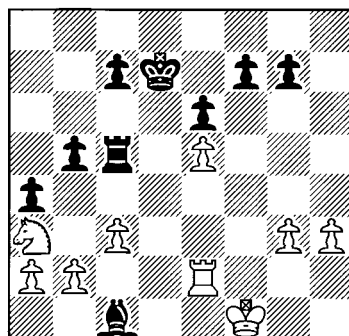
17 ♜f4 ♜d4 18 ♜e3 ♜c4 19 ♜xc5

19 ♜d1 ♜a4 is slightly better for Black.

19...♜xc5 20 ♜d1 ♜d8 21 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 22 ♜e4 a5 23 ♜f1 b5 24 ♜e2 a4 25 ♜b1

The natural 25 a3 loses spectacularly to 25...♜xc3! 26 bxc3 ♜xa3 when the bishop plus passed a-pawn is decisive.

25...h5 26 c3 ♜g5 27 g3 h4 28 ♜a3 hxg3 29 fxg3 ♜d7 30 ♜c2 ♜c1 31 ♜a3



31...c6

31...g6! with the idea of ...♙h6-g7, targeting the weak e-pawn (it hasn't been a strong wedge for a long time!), keeps Black's advantage. Unfortunately, now both players begin to misplay, probably due to time trouble.

32 h4 ♖d5 33 ♜f2 ♜d1+ 34 ♙g2 ♙e8 35 ♜c2 ♙e3 36 ♜e2 ♙c5 37 ♜c2 ♜b1 38 ♜b4 ♙d7 39 ♜d2+ ♙c7 40 a3 ♙b6 41 ♜d3 ♙e3 42 ♜e2 ♙h6 43 g4 g6

43...♜d1 44 ♜f2 ♜d2 45 ♙f3 ♜xe2 46 ♙xe2 ♙f4 47 ♜d3 ♙g3 48 h5 ♙h4 is equal, but now Black overreaches and should lose.

44 g5 ♙f8 45 ♜f2 c5 46 ♜xf7 c4 47 ♜f2 ♙c5 48 h5 ♜xb2 49 h6

White wins with 49 hxg6! ♜d2 50 g7 ♜d8 51 ♜e4 ♙xa3 52 ♜f6 ♙c5 (52...♙b2 53 ♜f8 loses more quickly) 53 ♜d7+ ♙c6 54 ♜f8 a3 55 g8♞ a2 56 ♜f1 and the extra queen is good enough.

49...♜d2 50 h7 ♜d8 51 ♜e4 ♙xa3 52 ♜f6

White can still draw with 52 ♜f6 ♜h8 53 ♜xe6+ ♙b7 54 ♜f6 b4 55 ♜e7+ ♙c6 56 ♜e8 ♜xh7 57 ♜xh7 bxc3 58 ♜c8+ ♙b5 59 ♜b8+ etc.

52...♜h8 53 ♜g7 b4 54 ♜xg6 bxc3 55 ♜d5+ ♙a5 56 ♜xc3 ♜xh7 57 ♜xe6 ♙b2 58 g6 ♜h5 59 ♜a2 ♜xe5

The drama is over and Black is just better again, with his far superior minor piece that defends against White's passed pawns and aids his own.

60 ♜d6 a3 61 ♙f3 ♜b5 62 ♜c6 ♙a4 0-1

The rook and pawn ending after 63 ♜xc4+ ♙b3 64 ♜g4 ♙xa2 65 g7 ♙xg7 66 ♜xg7 ♙b3 is an easy win.

Game 16

I.Boleslavsky-V.Mikenas
USSR Championship,
Moscow 1940

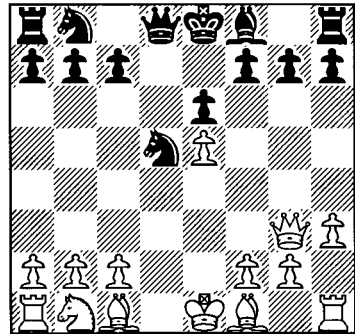
1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♜f3 ♙g4 5 h3

5 ♙e2, as Short played in Game 11, looks best.

5...♙xf3 6 ♞xf3 dxe5 7 dxe5 e6

The critical position is reached by transposition.

8 ♞g3



Now e5 is defended and g7 is attacked. What should Black do?

8...♜d7

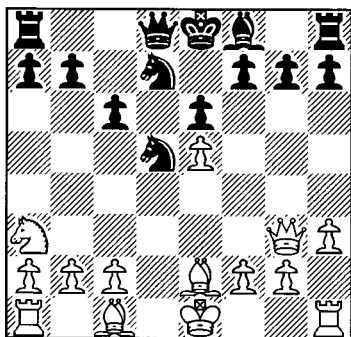
The answer is to attack the e-pawn as quickly as possible, using moves like the text, ...c7-c6 and ...♞c7; and the knight manoeuvre ...♜e7-f5 comes into consideration, tickling the queen, which is not such a good defender.

Black must get his play going quickly, before White consolidates and sets up an attacking position.

I can't recommend 8...♜c6 which

blocks the ...c7-c6/♖c7 idea, and allows White to develop strongly without loss of time: 9 ♖b5 ♘db4 10 0-0! (a bold sacrifice; instead the defensive 10 ♖a4 led to a draw after 10...b5 11 ♖b3 ♘d4 12 ♘a3 ♖d7 ½-½ J.Helbich-S.Koutsin, Olomouc 1998) 10...♗xc2 11 ♖g5 ♖e7 12 ♖xc6+ bxc6 13 ♖xe7 ♗xe7 14 ♗c3 ♗xa1 15 ♖xg7 ♖g8 16 ♖f6+ ♗e8 17 ♖f3 ♗c2 18 ♖xc6+ ♗f8 19 ♖d1 (White has a dangerous attack – unapproved by my computer, but obviously very difficult for a human to counter) 19...♖b8 20 ♖d7 ♖g7 21 a3 ♗e1 22 g3 ♖g6 23 ♗b5 ♗g7 24 ♗xc7 ♖xb2 25 ♖xa8 ♖e2 26 ♗e8+ ♗h6 27 ♖xf7 ♖d1 28 ♗h2 1-0 J.Jackova-R.Palliser, Millfield 2004.

9 ♖e2 c6 10 ♗a3



White prepares to meet 10...♖c7 with 11 ♗c4, holding e5 and eyeing d6. 10 0-0 is no problem for Black, as White lacks this option and must expose his king: 10...♖c7 11 f4 (weakening but necessary) 11...♗e7 12 ♖d3 (or 12 ♖d1 ♗f5 13 ♖f3 ♖c5+ 14 ♗h1 ♗d4 15 ♖d3 0-0-0 with sharp counterplay) 12...♗c5 and the black knights are very active.

10...♗e7

Black could seize the opportunity for the disorganizing check 10...♖a5+!? and now:

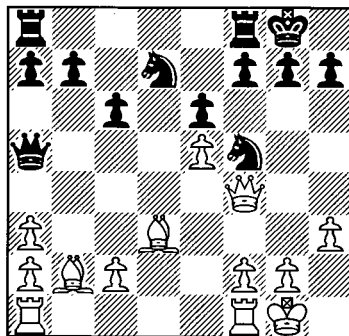
a) 11 c3 ♖xa3 12 bxa3 (not 12 ♖xg7? ♖f8 and Black wins) 12...♗xc3 13 ♖d2 ♗xe2 14 ♖xg7 ♖xe5 15 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♗xe2 ♖g8 and Black is up a good pawn.

b) 11 ♖d2 ♖b4 12 c3 ♖xa3 13 bxa3 ♖xa3 14 0-0 0-0-0 with double-edged play. White can only get his pawn back by opening the g-file on his own king, but the board is opening up and the white bishops may become dangerous, regardless of the material balance – all one can say is the position is unclear and double-edged.

11 0-0 ♗f5 12 ♖f4

An interesting combination is possible after 12 ♖c3 ♖c5 13 ♗c4 ♗b6 14 ♖d1 ♖d4 15 ♖f3 ♗xc4 16 ♖xc4 ♖xf2+! 17 ♗xf2 ♖h4+ and Black wins a pawn, but White can play 14 ♖g4 with equality.

12...♖xa3 13 bxa3 0-0 14 ♖d3 ♖a5 15 ♖b2

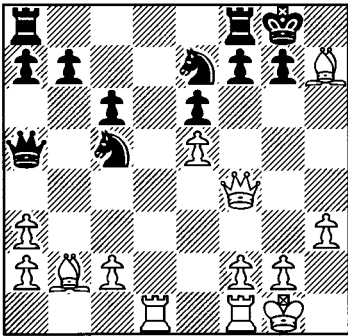


A position typical for this variation (one recalls Vukovic's fine win, given in the notes to the previous game): White has two bishops for two knights, but shattered pawns – roughly even is a fair assessment.

15...♘e7?!

Undefended! Correct is 15...♘b6! 16 ♖ab1 (if 16 ♙xf5 exf5 17 ♗xf5 ♘c4 18 ♙d4 ♖ad8 and Black will recover his pawn with the better game) 16...♖ad8 with a sharp game and mutual chances.

16 ♖ad1 ♘c5 17 ♙xh7+!



Exploiting the undefended knight to win a pawn, though Black still has drawing chances in view of White's bad pawns.

17...♙xh7 18 ♗h4+ ♙g8 19 ♗xe7 ♘a4 20 ♙a1 ♘c3 21 ♖d3

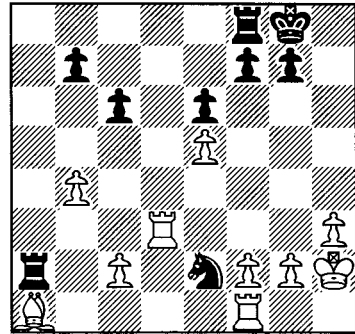
Better is 21 ♙xc3 ♗xc3 22 ♗xb7 which would make it hard for Black to draw.

21...♘e2+ 22 ♙h2 ♗a4 23 ♗b4 ♗xb4 24 axb4 a5 25 a3

I prefer 25 bxa5 ♖xa5 26 a3 ♖fa8 27 ♙b2, when Black doesn't have enough

for the pawn.

25...axb4 26 axb4 ♖a2



Now Black gets a little counterplay and successfully struggles to the draw.

27 ♖d2 ♘f4 28 ♖fd1 ♘d5 29 ♙d4 ♖fa8 30 c3 ♖a3 31 ♖d3 ♖b3 32 c4 ♖xd3 33 ♖xd3 ♘xb4 34 ♖b3 ♖a4 35 ♙c5 ♘a6 36 ♙d6 ♖xc4 37 ♖xb7 ♘c5 38 ♙xc5 ♖xc5 39 f4 g5 40 ♙g3 ♙g7 41 ♖c7 gxf4+ 42 ♙xf4 ♙g6 43 h4 ♖c4+ 44 ♙g3 c5 45 ♙h3 ♖c1 46 ♙g4 ♖c4+ 47 ♙h3 ♖c2 48 ♙g3 c4 49 h5+ ½-½

Black had a difficult defence in this game, and Palliser's debacle shows that being an opening book *author* does not save you from opening *surprises*. Of course, this pawn wedge line hasn't even been in *any* opening book – until now!

Summary

In general, Black should be fine with precise play: 5...♙g4 is necessary, then take the knight if asked, play ...e7-e6 as soon as possible (watch out for White's e5-e6 sac), and counter quickly against e5.

Chapter Three

Modern Variation II: A Danish/Latvian Co-Production

Our Hero: Edvins Kengis

After our repertoire moves of the previous chapter (1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5) White usually recaptures with the knight. I'm not sure people play this because they think it's better than 5 dxe5; more likely they do it because "everybody does it" (as we saw in the last chapter, they don't!), or because 5 ♘xe5 is "supposed to be best", or perhaps because the pawn capture was never mentioned in books, so it had to be bad!

In any case, while you must be prepared for 5 dxe5 (and we saw in the last chapter that accurate Bagirov-style play should equalize), you will much more likely get 5 ♘xe5 – which is, I admit, objectively best – and if you play Anand, you will *definitely* get 5 ♘xe5.

What should we do with this horse

on our side of the board? One of the clearest strategical ideas for Black is to take advantage of the fact that the pawn wedge is gone: now a fianchettoed king's bishop has a serious diagonal, unblocked by a pawn from g7-d4, and hitting said horse on the way. This idea, invented by the great Dane Bent Larsen and refined by the Latvian GM Edvins Kengis (the variation now bears the latter's name) is the subject of this chapter.

From a repertoire standpoint, I am recommending *both* 5...g6 and 5...c6. This is not because I can't make up my mind, but rather that the two lines often transpose to one another (see Game 1) and other lines (see, for example, Game 64, note to move 6) can transpose back into them! So it's essen-

tially pointless to know Kengis but not Carlsen, or vice versa.

There are certain differences between the lines and I will address these in the notes to the specific games. One could specialize in playing either 5...g6 or 5...c6, based on these small differences – or switch back and forth to confuse your opponents!

Game 17

E.Jimenez Zerquera-B.Larsen
Palma de Mallorca 1967

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 ♘f3 d6 4 d4 dxe5

Larsen comments: “Theoreticians have called this move a mistake, because it brings the white knight to a good square. But it may be playable: the idea should be to win back the ‘lost’ tempo by exchange threats against the white knight.” A very modest statement – and yet there are now around 2000 games in the database with this line!

5 ♘xe5

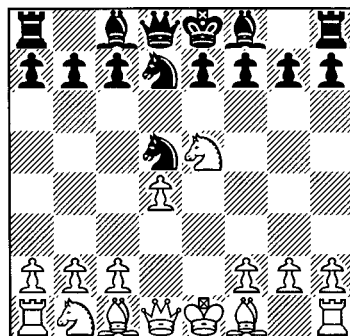
If 5 dxe5 then 5...♙g4!. Remember? Right, just checking!

5...g6

I like this and 5...c6, but a line I definitely *don't like* is the third most popular move, 5...♘d7.

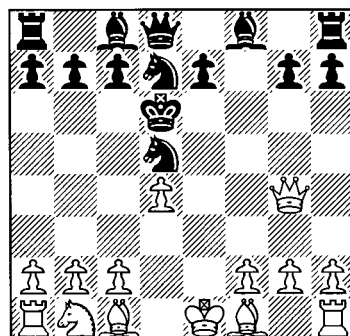
This was another Larsen novelty that he flung out vs. Tal, allowing the extremely dangerous 6 ♘xf7 ♙xf7 7 ♖h5+ when, as Tal said, the black king must go for a walk! Fearing prepared analysis, Tal avoided the sac and al-

most lost, but to me the whole line makes no practical sense. If you want to play this 5...♘d7, then you must spend hours and hours studying the insanely complicated and heavily booked-up sac on f7. After that, you have to deal with...



Disappointment: Your opponent doesn't want to play, and forces a draw: 6 ♘xf7 ♙xf7 7 ♖h5+ ♙e6 8 ♖g4+ ♙f7 9 ♖h5+ ♙e6 1/2-1/2 M.Golubev-M.Grunberg, Bucharest 2002.

Regret: You avoid said draw, and are crushed mercilessly: 6 ♘xf7 ♙xf7 7 ♖h5+ ♙e6 8 ♖g4+ ♙f7 9 ♖h5+ ♙e6 10 ♖g4+ ♙d6?



11 c4 ♘f6 12 ♖g3+ ♔e6 13 cxd5+ ♖xd5 14 ♘c3 ♖xd4 15 ♙e3 ♖b4 16 a3 ♖xb2 17 ♙c4+ ♘d7 18 ♖d1+ ♔e8 19 ♘b5 1-0 R.J.Fischer-B.Larsen, Santa Monica (free game) 1966.

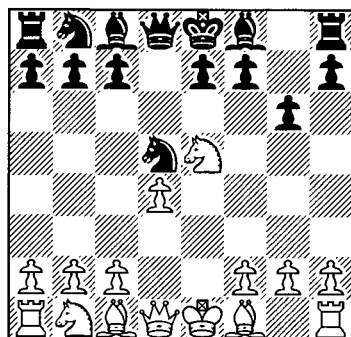
Software Remorse: Your opponent's computer is better than your computer, and his prepared line wins your queen before your prepared line starts: 6 ♘xf7 ♔xf7 7 ♖h5+ ♔e6 8 g3 b5 9 a4 c6 10 ♙h3+ ♘d6 11 ♘c3 b4 12 ♙f4+ ♘xf4 13 ♘e4+ ♔c7 14 ♖a5+ ♘b6 15 ♖e5+ ♖d6 16 ♘xd6 exd6 17 ♖xf4 ♙xh3 18 ♖f7+ ♙d7 19 O-O h5 20 h4 d5 21 ♖fe1 ♘c4 22 b3 ♘d6 23 ♖f4 ♖h6 24 ♖e5 ♖f6 25 ♖g5 ♙g4 26 ♖ae1 ♘f7 27 ♖e7+ ♙xe7 28 ♖xe7+ ♘d6 29 ♖e3 ♖e6 30 ♖xe6+ ♙xe6 31 ♖e2 ♙g4 32 f3 ♙f5 33 ♖d2 ♖e8 34 ♖xb4+ ♔c7 35 c4 ♙e6 36 ♖c5 ♘b7 37 ♘f2 dxc4 38 bxc4 ♙d7 39 ♖xh5 ♘d6 40 ♖c5 ♖e6 41 g4 ♖f6 42 ♔g2 g6 43 ♔g3 ♖e6 44 ♘f2 ♘e8 45 ♔g2 ♘d6 46 d5 1-0 I.Balinov-W.Posch, Oberwart 2001.

Ecstasy: Your new computer is better than your opponent's computer, he allows your prepared line, and you win!! 7 ♖h5+ ♔e6 8 c4 ♘5f6 9 d5+ ♘d6 10 ♖f7 ♘e5 11 ♙f4 c5 12 ♘c3 a6 13 O-O-O g6 14 ♙xe5+ ♔xe5 15 d6 ♙h6+ 16 ♔c2 ♖e8 17 ♖d5+ ♘xd5 18 ♖xd5+ ♘f6 19 ♙d3 exd6 20 ♖xd6+ ♘f7 21 ♘e4 ♖c6 22 ♖e5 ♖d8 0-1 E.Rozentalis-A.Sokolov, Bern 1992.

Agony: Your opponent *doesn't* have a computer and avoids all your preparation by playing 6 ♘f3! and grinds you down in the endgame: 6 ♘f3 g6 7 c4

♘5f6 8 ♘c3 ♙g7 9 g3 O-O 10 ♙g2 ♘b6 11 b3 e5 12 dxe5 ♖xd1+ 13 ♘xd1 ♘g4 14 ♙b2 ♘d7 15 e6 ♖e8 16 O-O ♖xe6 17 ♙xg7 ♔xg7 18 ♘d4 ♖e8 19 ♘b5 ♖d8 20 ♘xc7 ♖b8 21 ♘c3 ♘df6 22 ♖ad1 ♙d7 23 h3 ♘e5 24 ♖fe1 ♘c6 25 ♖d6 ♖bc8 26 ♘7b5 a6 27 ♘d4 ♘xd4 28 ♖xd4 b5 29 ♖ed1 ♖e8 30 ♙b7 ♖c7 31 ♙xa6 bxc4 32 ♙xc4 ♙xh3 33 a4 ♘g4 34 ♘d5 ♖b7 35 ♘f4 ♘e5 36 ♘xh3 ♘f3+ 37 ♔g2 1-0 R.Byrne-M.Rohde, New York 1989.

I get worn out just thinking about it! Now back to 5...g6, where we can at least play chess for a while!



6 ♙c4

Still the most popular move today, which I will examine further in the following three games. Also possible are: two "caveman" variations, 6 ♖f3 and 6 h4 (Games 21-22); the direct 6 c4 (Game 23); the positional 6 ♘d2 (Game 24); and White's best alternatives, the quiet but strong 6 ♙e2 and 6 g3 (Games 25-26).

6...♙e6

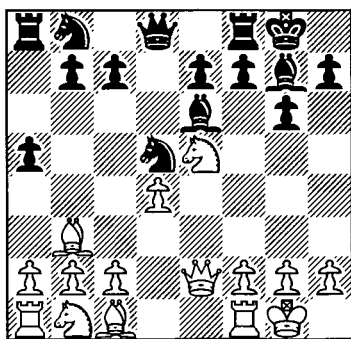
Nowadays 6...c6 is preferred, as it's

not clear where the c8-bishop belongs. But don't get careless with 6...♗g7? 7 ♖xf7! ♜xf7 8 ♜f3+ ♜e6 9 ♜e4+ and White wins!

7 ♗b3 ♗g7

A key strategic objective of the Ken-gis Variation is to *lengthen the diagonal of the g7-bishop*. Black has already removed the white pawn wedge at e5; next on the list is the d-pawn. If Black can soften that point or even remove the pawn altogether, his position will normally improve (one recalls that in Game 1 Carlsen cleared the bishop's diagonal all the way to b2!). Therefore Black often aims to get in either ...e5 or ...c5. Sometimes Black can attack further down the diagonal with minority attack moves like ...a5-a4-a3 or ...b5-b4.

8 0-0 0-0 9 ♜e2 a5



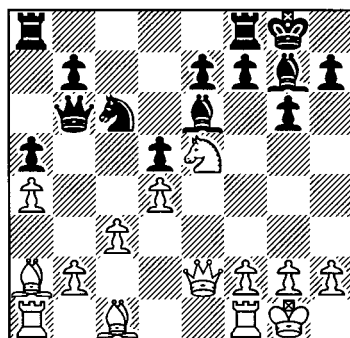
A typical Larsen rook pawn attack, with many positional ideas. If White plays a2-a4 to stop the pawn, and if White later employs c2-c4 to drive off the centralized black knight, said knight finds a brilliant square at b4. If the pawn is not stopped, it might ad-

vance all the way to a3, perhaps cooperating with the fianchettoed bishop.

10 ♖c3 c6 11 ♖xd5?!

Giving Black a central pawn majority and the good c6-square for the queen's knight – but even after the more logical 11 ♖e4 a4 12 ♗c4 ♖d7 White's good knight is exchanged or driven back, as 13 f4 would be too weakening in view of 13...♜b6.

11...cxd5 12 a4 ♖c6 13 c3 ♜b6 14 ♗a2



14...♗xe5!!

An absolutely stunning conception, that only an original thinker like Larsen could come up with: Black gives up the normally essential fianchettoed bishop *and* gives himself doubled isolated e-pawns which are normally always bad in Alekhine's Defence!

But a great player like Larsen sees that this position is exceptional. First of all, after the coming exchanges, White will be left with but one minor piece, a dark-squared bishop, that is unable to attack the usually very weak e6-pawn! In fact White is the one with weak pawns on the queenside and his "wedge" pawn

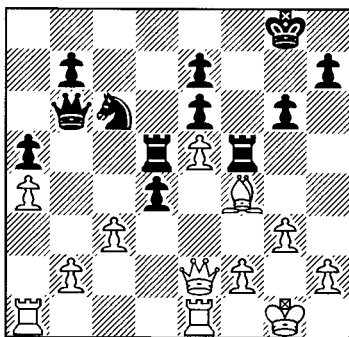
Alekhine Alert!

at e5 is weak as well! Black is left with the superior minor piece and open files for his rooks – bravo, Bent!

15 dxe5 d4!

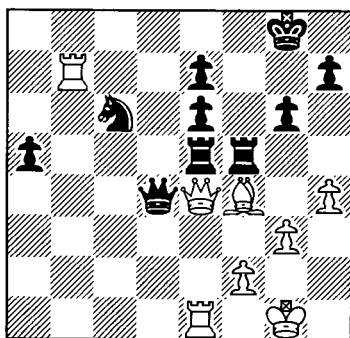
“Advantage for Black,” says Larsen, and I second the motion.

16 ♖h6 ♜fd8 17 ♙xe6 fxe6 18 ♜fe1 ♜d5 19 ♙f4 ♜f8 20 g3 ♜f5



Beautiful! The black rooks take up light square outposts (where the only white minor piece can't attack them) and pressure White's position from every side.

21 ♜ad1 ♜b3 22 h4 ♜xa4 23 ♜e4 ♜b3 24 cxd4 ♜xb2 25 ♜b1 ♜xd4 26 ♜xb7 ♜dxe5!

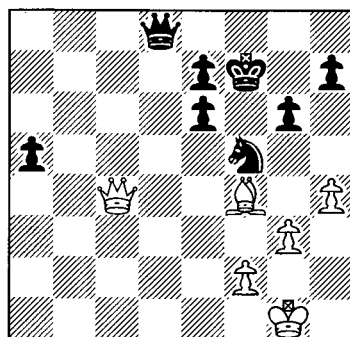


Larsen is unstoppable!

27 ♜b1

If 27 ♙xe5 ♜xf2+ 28 ♙h1 ♜xe5 29 ♜xe5 ♙xe5 30 ♜b8+ ♙g7 31 ♜xe5 ♜xg3 32 ♜bb5 ♜xh4+ 33 ♙g2 a4 and five extra pawns should be enough.

27...♜xe1+ 28 ♜xe1 ♜d5 29 ♜c1 ♙d4 30 ♜b8+ ♜f8 31 ♜xf8+ ♙xf8 32 ♙h6+ ♙e8 33 ♜c8+ ♜d8 34 ♜c4 ♙f5 35 ♙f4 ♙f7



Now the black king is safe, as Larsen notes, and he can win by combining the advance of his passed pawn with queen + knight attacks against the white king.

36 ♙e5 ♜d1+ 37 ♙h2 ♜d2 38 ♜c5 a4 39 ♙c3 ♜c2 40 ♙g1 ♜d1+ 41 ♙h2 ♜d5 42 ♜b4 ♜f3 43 ♙g1 a3 0-1

White resigns as the passed pawn is too strong, but can't be taken either; i.e. 44 ♜xa3 ♙d4 and now:

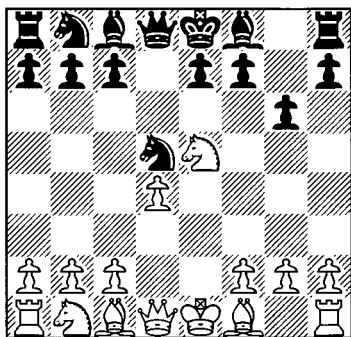
a) 45 ♙f1 ♜h1 mate.

b) 45 ♙b4 ♙e2+ 46 ♙h2 (or 46 ♙f1 ♙xg3+) 46...♜xf2+ 47 ♙h3 ♙g1+ and mates.

c) 45 ♜b2 ♜xc3! wins a piece.

Game 18
P.Ostojic-E.Kengis
 German League 1992

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5
 ♘xe5 g6



The young Kengis saw Larsen's idea, liked it, and set out to make the variation his own. Still far from GM strength, he lost with 5...g6 his first time out. Was he discouraged? No! He played it three more times – three more losses. Now most people who lose four games in a row with the same variation might give up on it, but not our persevering Latvian: with his fifth game in the variation that would bear his name, he finally made a draw! Then he draws five more games! Finally he wins one! Now he has his line down, and from that big win in 1989 until he gave up the variation in 1996, Kengis made such a plus score with Black that he wiped out the 0-4 deficit with which he started. He defeated strong GMs like Christiansen and Gallagher with his

variation, and ended up (this includes those young losses) with a highly respectable overall plus score of eight wins, seven losses and twenty draws.

He also developed many interesting positional ideas that are specific to this particular structure, which I will discuss in the following notes.

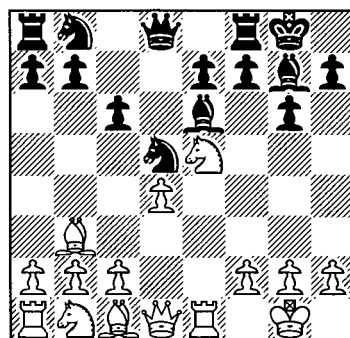
6 ♗c4

Played, as we saw, in the first game with this line and still the most popular move today. But it seems to me that this primitive attack on f7 gets nowhere, and we will see that Kengis has no problem dealing with it.

6...c6 7 0-0 ♗g7 8 ♖e1

Even quieter was 8 ♗b3 0-0 9 c3 ♗f5 10 ♖a3 ♘d7 11 ♘ac4 ♘5b6 12 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 13 ♖e1 ♘xc4 14 ♗xc4 e5 when Black equalized cleanly with this diagonal opening move, and after 15 dxe5 ♗xd1 16 ♖xd1 ♗xe5 17 ♗h6 ♖fd8 18 ♗g5 ♖xd1+ 19 ♖xd1 ♗g7 20 f3 h5 21 ♗e3 a6 22 ♗b6 ♖e8 23 g3 ♗f6 it was completely equal, J.Coret Frasquet-I.Abreu Suarez, Spanish Team Ch. 1994.

8...0-0 9 ♗b3 ♗e6



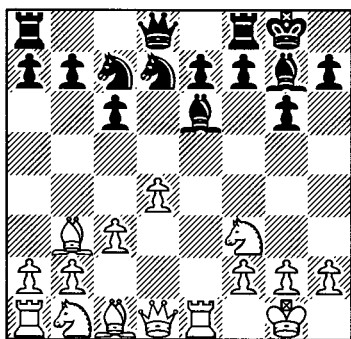
Accurate! Black challenges the bishop on b3. Kengis has done very well from this position, but look what happens to Adams in the next game when he plays the less precise 9...♖d7. For the Larsen-style 9...a5, which is also good, see Game 20.

10 h3

White has some alternatives:

a) 10 c4 ♖b6 puts unpleasant pressure on c4 and d4. (Kasparov was able to get c2-c4 in “for free” vs. Adams, but only against inaccurate play.)

b) 10 c3 ♖d7 11 ♖f3 ♖c7 introduces another Kengis strategical idea: exchange the light-squared bishops.



This leaves White with the worse bishop (blocked by the d-pawn) while Black's cleric tends to become stronger as the game goes on and the long diagonal opens. One can see that Black is already equal. J.Howell-E.Kengis, London 1991, continued 12 ♗xe6 ♜xe6 13 ♜b3 ♜b6 14 ♜c4 (14 ♜bd2 is better – White probably overlooked the temporary sac of the e-pawn) 14...c5! 15 d5 ♜c7 (a second well-refined Kengis idea:

a pawn is sacrificed to liven up Black's play, here Black gets it right back with the better game; meanwhile note that – fundamental Kengis – the long dark diagonal has been cleared of one more pawn!) 16 ♜xe7 ♜d6 17 ♜e1 ♜xd5 18 ♜a3 ♜b6 19 ♜xd5 ♜cxd5 (Black has strong pressure against White's undeveloped queenside) 20 ♜g5 h6 21 ♜d2 ♜a4 22 ♜ab1 ♜fe8 23 ♜f1 a6 24 ♜c4 b5 25 ♜e3 ♜ed8 26 ♜ec1 ♜f6 27 c4 ♜e4 28 ♜c2 ♜d3 29 ♜e1 ♜e8 30 ♜d2 ♜d6 31 ♜e2 ♜dx3+! (Black breaks up White's position with this stylish exchange sac) 32 fxe3 ♜f5 33 ♜f2 ♜d4+ 34 ♜d1 ♜xc2 35 ♜xc2 f5 36 a3 ♜f7 37 b3 ♜c3 38 ♜f1 h5 39 h3 ♜e4 40 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 41 cxb5 axb5 42 ♜d1 ♜h6 43 ♜d3 ♜e6 44 ♜e2 ♜g5 45 ♜f3 h4 46 ♜d2 ♜f6 47 ♜a2 ♜d5 48 a4 b4 49 a5 c4! (a well-calculated win) 50 bxc4+ (if 50 a6 cxb3 51 a7 ♜e8 52 a8♜+ ♜xa8 53 ♜xa8 b2 and queens) 50...♜xc4 51 a6 b3 52 ♜a4+ ♜b5 0-1. White resigns in view of 53 ♜a3 b2 54 ♜b3+ (or Black comes first in a big way: 54 a7 b1♜ 55 a8♜ ♜d1 mate!) 54...♜xa6 and the passed b-pawn will cost White a rook.

10...♖d7 11 ♖f3 ♖c7

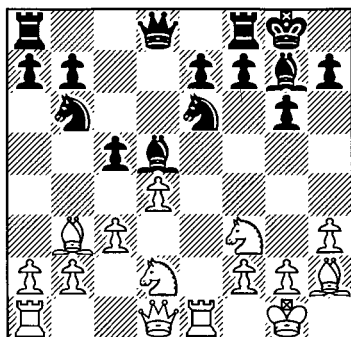
Kengis' typical manoeuvre equalizes for Black.

12 c3 ♗d5 13 ♗f4

13 ♗g5 gave White nothing in S.Polgar-E.Kengis, Vienna 1991, after 13...♜e6 14 ♗e3 b5 15 ♗xd5 cxd5 16 ♜b3 ♜c7 17 ♗f4 e6!, as Kengis offered one of his now standard positional pawn sacs (but he must have lost a few

early games trying to figure out when these worked and when they didn't!). This one is clearly sound as Black gets open lines on the queenside and Benko-style pressure: 18 ♖xc7 ♜xc7 19 ♜xb5 ♜ab8 20 ♜e2 ♜b6 21 b3 ♜fc8 22 ♜d3 ♜a5 23 ♜fd2 e5! (Black breaks in the centre while White is still undeveloped; note the recurring theme of lengthening the diagonal of the g7-bishop) 24 dxe5 ♜xe5 25 ♜g3 ♜c6 26 a4 d4 27 b4 ♜d8 28 ♜e4 dxc3 29 ♜bxc3 ♜xb4 (Black recovers his pawn with the better game, and outplays White in the subsequent tactics) 30 ♜ad1 ♜d4 31 ♜h1 ♜b3 32 ♜e3 ♜a5 33 ♜d6 ♜f5 34 ♜d7 ♜f8 35 ♜d5 ♜b4 36 ♜xf5 gxf5 37 ♜xf5 ♜xc3 38 ♜xc3 (or 38 ♜g5 ♜c1+ 39 ♜h2 ♜d6+ 40 ♜g3 ♜g6 41 ♜d5 ♜b1 when Black has an extra rook and a mating attack) 38...♜xc3 39 ♜g5 ♜h4 0-1.

13...♜e6 14 ♜h2 ♜b6 15 ♜bd2 c5!



All the Kengis themes in one!

a) Black lengthens the diagonal of his fianchettoed bishop and breaks up the white centre;

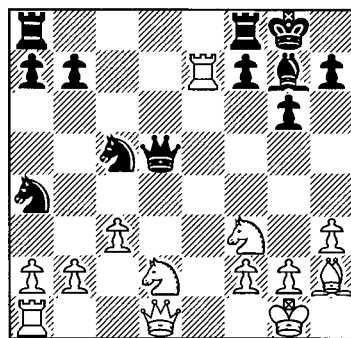
b) the light-squared bishops are exchanged;

c) the black e-pawn is sacrificed for queenside pressure.

16 dxc5 ♜xc5 17 ♜xd5 ♜xd5!

Fritz's number one, 17...♜xd5, is of course possible, but Kengis is playing for a win!

18 ♜xe7 ♜ba4



One sees the power of Black's fianchettoed dark-squared bishop now: both b2 and c3 are under severe pressure, and obviously 19 b3 is terrible due to 19...♜xc3.

19 ♜c2 ♜ae8 20 ♜ae1

Also after 20 c4 ♜c6 21 ♜c7 ♜b6 22 ♜b3 ♜a6 23 ♜d7 ♜xb2 Black recovers the pawn with some advantage.

20...♜xe7 21 ♜xe7 ♜xa2

Black recovers his pawn with a good game.

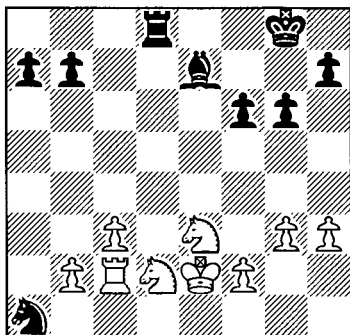
22 ♜d6 ♜d5 23 ♜xc5

Now Black's advantage is permanent (the better minor piece); it's not clear that Black can increase the pressure after the simple retreat 23 ♜g3.

23...♜xc5 24 ♜f1 ♜f6 25 ♜e2 ♜d3 26

Alekhine Alert!

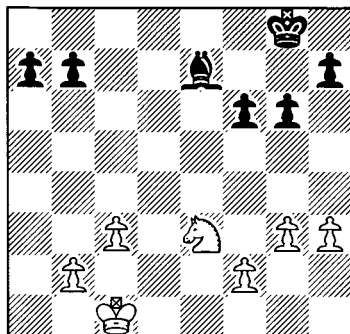
♙xd3 ♘xd3 27 g3 ♖d8 28 ♘e3 ♘c1 29 ♜c2 ♘b3 30 ♙f1 ♙e7 31 ♙e2 f6 32 ♘d2 ♘a1!



Black cleverly liquidates into an ending that is going to be a nightmare for White to draw.

33 ♜c1 ♜xd2+ 34 ♙xd2 ♘b3+ 35 ♙c2 ♘xc1 36 ♙xc1

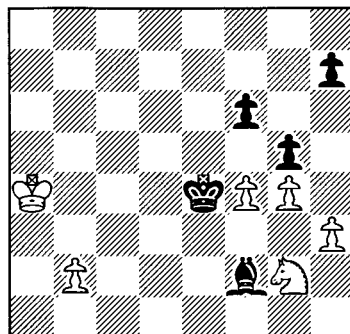
With the long-range bishop and slightly more outside pawns on the queenside, Black has a serious advantage.



36...♙c5 37 ♘d5 ♙f7 38 f3 ♙d6 39 g4 b5 40 ♙c2 ♙e6 41 ♘e3 ♙c5 42 ♘g2 g5 43 ♘e1 a5 44 ♙d3 ♙e5 45 c4 ♙f2 46 ♘g2 bxc4+ 47 ♙xc4 a4 48 ♙b4

The last hope is 48 b4, for if Black takes en passant, White should draw – but after 48...a3! 49 ♙b3 ♙d4 50 ♙xa3 ♙d3 Black wins, as his bishop both corals White's knight and neutralizes the b-pawn.

48...♙d4 49 ♙xa3 ♙d3 50 f4 ♙e4 0-1



White resigns, as his paralyzed knight will be lost after 51 fxg5 fxg5 52 b4 (giving Black the wrong colour rook's pawn doesn't work either as the white king is too far away, and the superlative black bishop cuts off said king when it tries to approach: 52 h4 gxh4 53 ♘xh4 ♙xh4 54 ♙b3 ♙f3 55 ♙c2 ♙xg4 56 ♙d1 ♙f3 57 b4 ♙g3 58 b5 h5 etc) 52...♙f3 53 b5 ♙xg2 and the bishop will deal with White's b-pawn, after which Black finishes easily in the king and pawn ending. A triumph for the Kengis bishop!

The main game and the two Kengis wins given in the notes show his mastery of the position. It's clear that White gets nothing when the light-squared bishops are exchanged, but Black has a more difficult task in lines

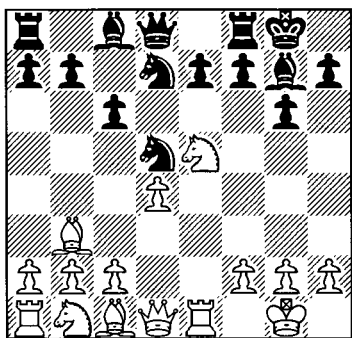
where White's bishop is kept back. This does not mean Black has a free ride after 6 ♟c4 , however, as the following game shows – accuracy is still required!

Game 19
G.Kasparov-M.Adams
Linares 1997

1 e4 ♟f6 2 e5 ♟d5 3 d4 d6

One should note that Kasparov (whenever he had this position, only four times) continued with the strongest 4 ♞f3 on every occasion, a tradition that Anand has carried on. Kasparov's score was similar as well: three wins and only one draw!

4 ♞f3 dxe5 5 ♞xe5 g6 6 ♟c4 c6 7 0-0 ♟g7 8 ♞e1 0-0 9 ♟b3 ♞d7



An important mistake. As we saw in the previous game, correct is Kengis' 9... ♟e6 which challenges White's light-squared bishop and deters c2-c4.

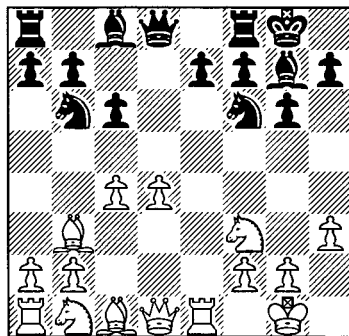
10 ♞f3

A typical manoeuvre for White in the Kengis: the first player avoids ex-

changes given his slight space advantage.

10...♞7f6 11 c4 ♞c7

Because of Black's loss of time, he can't set up counter-pressure with ... ♞b6 and ... ♟e6 ; e.g. 11... ♞b6 12 h3



12... ♟e6 13 ♞xe6! (shattering Black's position: Black has to always watch out for pawn or exchange sacs on this square in the Alekhine, as the resulting doubled pawns are almost always weak – unless you're Larsen, of course!) 13...fxe6 14 ♞c3 ♞d7 15 ♞e2 ♞h5 16 ♞e4 ♞f6 17 ♞h4 ♞h5 18 ♟e3 and White has excellent long-term compensation.

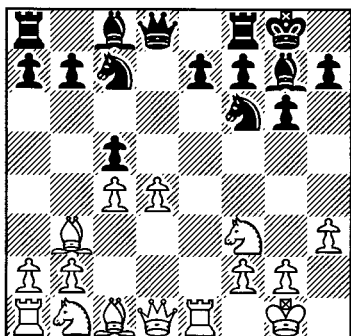
Other 12th moves don't seem to work either: 12... ♟f5 13 ♞c3 ♞c7 14 ♟g5 ♟e6 15 ♞e2 (15 ♞xe6 is also strong here, but now White's position is so good due to Black's further loss of time [... ♟f5-e6] that he doesn't even need to sac) 15... ♞fe8 16 ♟e3 ♞c8 17 ♞g5 ♞f8?? (Black essentially resigns the game; clearly 17... ♟d7 is forced, though White has a big advantage) 18 ♞xe6 fxe6 19 ♟g5 ♞h8 20 ♞xe6 ♞h5 21

Alekhine Alert!

♖ad1 ♜f4 22 ♜e3 1-0 J.Gallagher-G.Lukasiewicz, Bern 1990.

Finally let's take a quick look at the following amusing game, in which Black retreats with 12...♜bd7 and after 13 ♜c3 e6 gives up any hope of active play. White then methodically improves his position: 14 ♜f4 b6 15 ♜d2 ♜b7 16 ♖ad1 ♜e8 17 ♜c1 ♜c8 18 ♜g5 ♜f8 19 a3 a6 20 ♜ce4 ♜xe4 21 ♜xe4 ♜f6 22 ♜g5 ♜e7 23 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 24 c5! – an excellent move, clearing the diagonal for his light-squared bishop, while simultaneously blocking Black's. The d-pawn is immune as 24...♜xd4?? 25 ♜c4 wins a piece; furthermore White threatens ♜d6, which shows that both of White's minor pieces are more active than his opponent's. Given all that, one must note that the players have now made a semi-credible 25 moves, and therefore the two GMs agreed to a draw!! 1/2-1/2 M.Matulovic-G.Todorovic, Yugoslav Team Ch. 1995. For the record, *Fritz* puts White at about +1 here, giving as best 24...♜e7 25 h4 with attack.

12 h3 c5



Black gets the key break in, but it's already too late as White controls the centre.

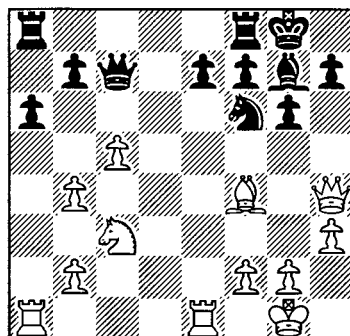
13 ♜c3 cxd4 14 ♜xd4 ♜e6 15 ♜e3 ♜xd4 16 ♜xd4 ♜e6

After 16...♜xd4 17 ♜xd4 White has a dangerous queenside pawn majority and pressure down the e-file.

17 ♜h4 ♜a5 18 c5 ♜xb3 19 axb3

The bishop exchange usually helps Black, but here it just gives White the a-file.

19...♜c7 20 b4 a6 21 ♜f4



21...♜c6

Black must give up a pawn, as 21...♜d7 22 ♖ad1 ♜e8 23 ♜d6 wins for White.

22 ♜xe7 ♜d5 23 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 24 ♜g4 ♜ae8

24...♜xb2 25 ♖d1 ♜c6 26 ♜d6, with the ideas of ♜c7 and ♜e2, gives White an overwhelming position.

25 ♜d7 ♜xd7 26 ♜xd7 ♜xb2 27 ♖ad1 ♜e4 28 ♜d6 ♜c8 29 ♜xb7

White keeps his pawn and the ending is hopeless.

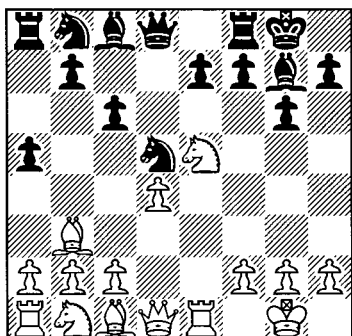
29...♜c3 30 ♜b1 ♜c4 31 ♜c1 ♜xb4 32 c6

♖d4 33 c7 1-0

This shows that even a small error (developing the wrong piece, knight instead of bishop) can lead almost immediately to a worse game. White must not be allowed to set up a d4/c4 centre without any compensating pressure for Black.

Game 20 N.Short-S.Agdestein Isle of Lewis 1995

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5
♘xe5 g6 6 ♙c4 c6 7 ♙b3 ♙g7 8 0-0 0-0
9 ♙e1 a5



Agdestein, who has a great feel for this variation, continues in Larsen style: he prepares to push the b3-bishop to c2 where it might be exchanged for his own bishop and, furthermore, starts what might be a minority attack on the queenside, with the constant Kengis aim of lengthening or softening the long diagonal for the bishop on g7.

10 c3 ♙f5

Kengis himself, as we have seen, liked the bishop on e6 so as to challenge directly with ...♘c7. Agdestein's idea is to play ...a5-a4 and so force an exchange on c2. Right now White can sidestep with ♙c4, so first Black has to take that square under control.

11 h3 ♘d7 12 ♘f3 ♘7b6

Now threatening ...a5-a4 forcing a favourable exchange.

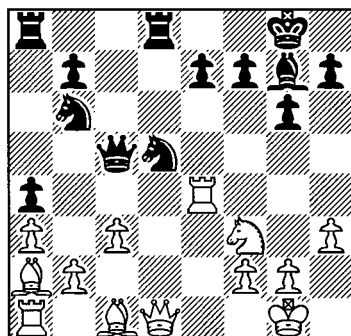
13 a3 ♙c7 14 ♘bd2 a4 15 ♙a2

Even though White avoids the exchange, the weakness at b3 will be a consistent negative feature throughout the game. If 15 ♙c2 ♙xc2 16 ♙xc2 c5 and the Kengis Variation is firing on all cylinders, with minority attack, ever longer long diagonal, etc.

15...c5

This is the positional move and probably best, though Black could also fish in murky tactical waters with 15...♘f4!? 16 ♘e4 ♘bd5.

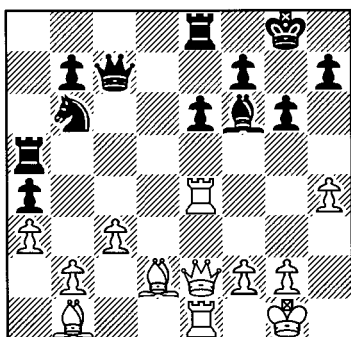
16 dxc5 ♙xc5 17 ♘e4 ♙xe4 18 ♙xe4
♙fd8



This is typical for the variation: Black has succeeded in his aims

(lengthened long diagonal, broken-up White's centre), but has had to pay "the two bishops". All in all, an opening success for Black, in that Agdestein has equalized – but it's way premature to say that Black is better.

**19 ♖c2 e6 20 ♙g5 ♜dc8 21 ♞ae1 ♚a5
22 ♚e2 ♞e8 23 ♙d2 ♚c5 24 ♜e5 ♚c7
25 ♜g4 ♜f6 26 ♜xf6+ ♙xf6 27 ♙b1
♞a5 28 h4**



Short is trying to make something happen on the kingside, but there's not really much chance of success, as Black has the only centre pawn and the strong rook on the fifth rank.

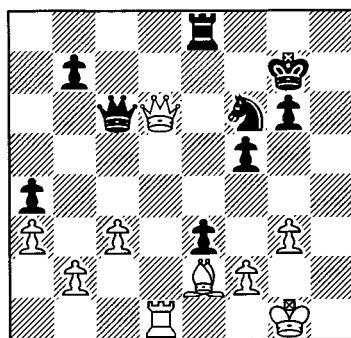
**28...♚c6 29 g3 ♙e7 30 ♙f4 ♜d7 31 ♙c2
♙c5 32 ♙g5 ♚g7 33 ♚d2 f6 34 ♙h6+
♜f7 35 h5 f5 36 ♞h4 ♜f6 37 hxg6+
hxg6 38 ♙e3 ♙xe3 39 ♚xe3 ♞aa8**

Time pressure on both sides: Black should play 39...e5 with a good position as in the game, and White should now prevent it with 40 ♚e5.

**40 ♙d1 e5 41 ♙f3 e4 42 ♙e2 ♞ad8 43
♞h6 ♞h8 44 ♞xh8 ♞xh8 45 ♙d1 ♜g7 46
♚f4 ♞e8 47 ♚d6 e3**

This might be a good point to recall

Kengis' personal statistics of 20 draws to 8 wins with his variation. It is a fact that if White plays soundly it's hard for Black to generate winning chances. We've seen Agdestein play an excellent game, but we can't ignore that White can essentially force a draw here: 48 ♚xc6 bxc6 49 fxe3 ♞xe3 50 ♜f2 ♞e7 51 ♙f3 ♜e4+ 52 ♙xe4 ♞xe4 53 ♞d7+ ♜f6 54 ♙d6+ ♞e6 55 ♙d4 ♞e4 56 ♙d6+ (not 56 ♙xe4?? fxe4 57 ♜e3 ♜f5 and Black wins the pawn ending, since White's queenside is lamed by the long lasting weakness at b3) 56...♞e6 with a draw.



48 f3?

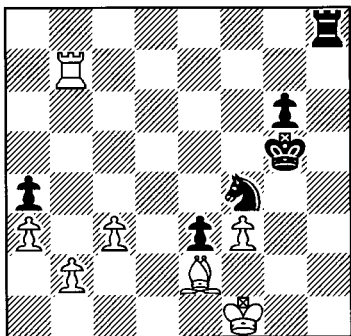
But Short plays for a win – and loses! Sorry, Nigel, but I've done the same thing.

**48...♚xd6 49 ♞xd6 ♜h5 50 ♙d7+ ♜h6
51 ♜g2 f4**

Now the black e-pawn is too strong.
52 gxf4 ♜xf4+ 53 ♜f1 ♜g5 54 ♞xb7

54 ♞h7 fails to prevent the infiltration: 54...♜f6 55 ♞h4 g5 56 ♞h6+ ♜g7 57 ♞h2 ♙d8 and Black finds a new route and wins.

54...♞h8 0-1

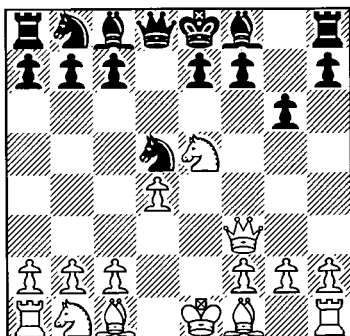


White has no perpetual and can't escape the fatal rook penetration; e.g. 55 ♖b5+ ♔f6 56 ♖b6+ ♔e5 57 ♖b5+ ♔d6 58 ♔g5 ♖h2 59 ♖g4 ♖f2+.

This was a great win by Magnus Carlsen's fellow Norwegian and first teacher – but note that White could have forced a draw as late as move 48!

Game 21 V.Nevednichy-M.Grunberg Paks 2007

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 g6 6 ♖f3



White brings out a big club and threatens mate in one!

6...♙e6

White barely scores 51% after Grunberg's natural response here, but grabs 83% if Black plays the craven 6...f6, which impresses even less if one looks at the following game: 7 ♙c4 (White already has a big lead in development and activity) 7...c6 8 ♘d3 ♙g7 9 ♙b3 0-0 10 0-0 ♖h8 11 ♘c3 ♘xc3 12 bxc3 ♖a5 13 a4 ♖xc3 14 ♙b2 ♖a5 15 ♖fe1 and White won easily in A.Smirnov-A.Tretiakov, Ishevsk 2005.

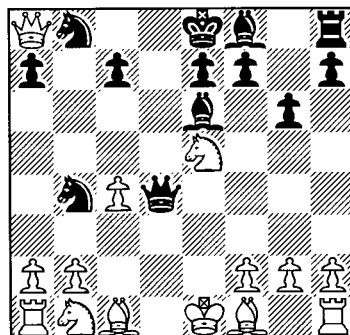
7 c4

Presumably the point of White's last move: against anything else Black just plays 7...c6 and it's hard to see why the white queen is on f3; e.g. 7 ♙c4 c6 8 0-0 ♘d7 9 ♘c3 ♙g7 and Black was already equal and went on to win in A.Sherzer-A.Panchenko, Chicago 1992.

7...♘b4 8 ♖xb7

Not 8 d5? ♘c2+ 9 ♔d1 ♘xa1 and the d-pawn is pinned.

8...♖xd4 9 ♖xa8



White is momentarily a rook up, but

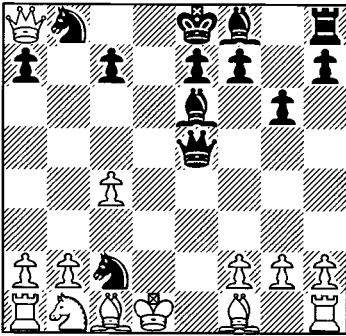
Alekhine Alert!

his king will be stuck in the centre and his queen is not playing.

9...♘c2+

I can't recommend 9...♞xe5+ 10 ♙e2, when White gets to develop. After the game check the white king must block his own bishop.

10 ♙e2 ♞xe5+ 11 ♚d1



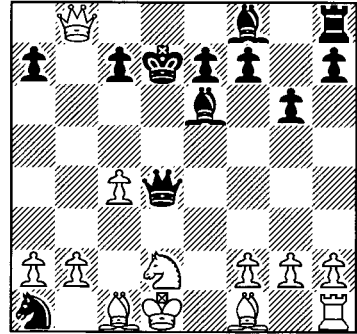
11...♞d4+

Tempting but a bit too fanciful is 11...♞e1+? 12 ♙xc2 ♙f5+ 13 ♙d3 ♞e2+ 14 ♙b3 ♞xd3+ 15 ♘c3 ♞c2+ 16 ♙b4 e5+ 17 ♙a5 ♙b4+ 18 ♙xb4 0-0 19 ♙a3 ♘d7 20 ♞f3 ♘b6 21 ♞e2 ♞b8, when White wins with the cold-blooded 22 ♞xc2 ♘xc4+ 23 ♙a4 c5 (there are no saves in 23...♙xc2+ 24 b3 or 23...♙d7+ 24 ♘b5) 24 ♞b3 ♙d7+ 25 ♘b5 1-0 M.Keller-M.Etmans, correspondence 1995, for if 25...a6 26 ♞xc4 axb5+ 27 ♙b3 bxc4+ 28 ♙xc4 and White comes out a rook ahead.

12 ♘d2

With the black queen centralized on d4, White can't take the knight: 12 ♙xc2? ♙f5+ 13 ♙b3 ♞b6+ 14 ♙c3 ♙g7+ 15 ♙d2 0-0 with a winning attack.

12...♘xa1 13 ♞xb8+ ♙d7



14 ♞b5+

White ends the brief excitement. Not 14 c5 ♞xc5 15 ♙b5+ c6 16 ♞b7+ ♙d8 17 ♙xc6?? (17 ♞b8+ still draws) 17...♞c2+ 18 ♙e2 ♙c4 and Black forces mate.

14...♙c8

14...♙d6? 15 ♙d3! allows White to develop – in general it seems that neither side can safely avoid the draw.

15 ♞e8+ ♙b7 16 ♞b5+ ♙c8 17 ♞e8+ ♙b7 18 ♞b5+ ½-½

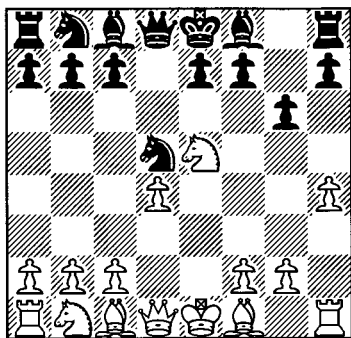
This high-level game seems to be the last word on this variation. Kengis fans must be willing to accept a draw, if that's really what White wants.

There's a philosophical question here: should Black always play for a win from the start? I've spent most of my career trying hard (or too hard) to win with either colour, but in view of the booked-up passivity of many White players now, I've been thinking of changing my style. I will always play hard to win with White, but perhaps

it's best simply to take the draw with Black (with good grace and a firm handshake) if that's all your opponent wants. He's thrown away the theoretical advantage of the white pieces, and you're rested for your next game – in which, playing White, you will go 100% for the win!

Game 22
S.Zakic-I.Marinkovic
Svetozarevo 1990

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 g6 6 h4



I don't think White wants a draw here – and he doesn't get it!

6...♘d7

Black follows Larsen by offering an immediate exchange of White's best piece. Black also makes a step toward castling queenside – if he's even worried about the attack!

The highest rated player who faced the seemingly fierce 6 h4, American IM Michael Valvo, was a little overly non-

chalant, as he played a kind of "full ignore" plan – yes, he won the game, but I think his play was too risky (see note to move 11): 6...♙g7 7 h5 ♘b4 8 c3 ♘4c6 (even for an Alekhine, this is a lot of knight moves!) 9 f4 ♙d5 10 ♘d2 ♘xe5 11 dxe5 (the natural 11 fxe5 is better, creating a solid block against the Kengis bishop, when Black is somewhat worse) 11...0-0 12 ♙b3 ♙e6 13 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 14 ♘c4 ♘d7 15 ♙e3 ♘b6 16 ♘a5 ♙fd8 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 ♙h2 f6! and Black broke up White's centre and went on to win in J.Carleton-M.Valvo, London 1978 – but after 11 fxe5 such a break would not have been so easy.

7 ♘xd7

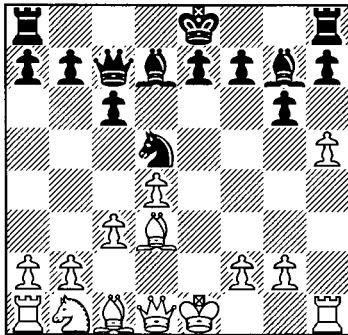
Direct attack gets nowhere: 7 ♙f3 ♘xe5 8 dxe5 ♙e6 9 h5 ♙g7 and Black is better with three minor pieces out vs. White's lone queen. Also, on the consistent 7 h5 Black just develops the Kengis bishop with tempo – and in the following game said bishop takes a terrible revenge for White's effrontery in attacking so prematurely: 7...♙g7 8 ♘g4 gxf6 9 ♙xf6 ♘7f6 10 ♘xf6+ ♘xf6 11 ♙h4 h5 12 ♙g5 ♙d5 13 ♙e3 ♘g4 14 ♘c3 ♙d8 15 ♙f3 ♘xe3 16 fxe3 ♙g4 17 ♙xb7 0-0 18 ♙d5 ♙b8 19 ♙e2 e5 (the typical diagonal opening blast) 20 ♙xd8 ♙fxd8 21 ♙xg4 exd4 22 ♘e2 hxg4 23 ♘xd4 ♙xb2 24 ♙xg4 ♙d5 25 c3 ♘f8 26 e4 ♙a5 27 ♙f4 ♙e5 28 ♙f2? ♙g3! 0-1 O.Moen-J.Tisdall, Gausdal 1996.

7...♙xd7 8 h5 ♙g7 9 ♙d3

Alekhine Alert!

Better is the consistent 9 hxg6 hxg6 (if 9...fxg6 10 ♖c3 and White can at least hope to exploit the a2-g8 diagonal) 10 ♜xh8+ ♔xh8 11 ♜d2 c5 with a minimal advantage for Black.

9...c6 10 c3 ♜c7



11 ♜f3

If 11 ♜a3, then 11...e5 with a typical Kengis break on the long diagonal, which is even stronger here because of White's lack of development.

After the text Black could aim to castle queenside, but clearly he finds White's "attack" so inoffensive that he "castles into it".

11...0-0 12 h6

White waited too long: with a black rook on f8 it's too dangerous to take on g6; e.g. 12 hxg6 fxg6 13 ♜e2 e5! 14 dxe5 (if 14 ♜xh7 ♔xh7 15 ♜h5+ ♔g8 16 ♔xg6 ♜f6 stops the attack cold) 14...♜ae8 and the counter-attack shines.

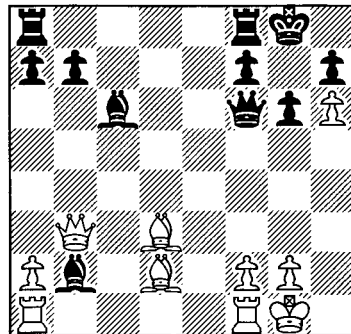
12...♔h8 13 0-0 e5

The h-pawn advance has come to nothing, while Black breaks in the centre, typical expanding the g7-bishop's range.

14 ♔g5?

Losing a pawn. White can hope to equalize with the alternative 14 dxe5 ♔xe5 15 ♜d2.

14...exd4 15 cxd4 ♔xd4 16 ♜c3 ♜e5 17 ♔d2 ♜f6 18 ♜xd5 cxd5 19 ♜xd5 ♔c6 20 ♜b3 ♔xb2



The Kengis diagonal is completely open, and Black is materially and positionally better.

21 ♜ae1 ♔e5 22 ♔e4 ♜fe8 23 ♔xc6 bxc6 24 ♜e3 ♔d4 25 ♜f3 ♜e6 26 ♜a4 ♜d5 27 ♜c1 c5 28 ♜a5 ♔e7?!

Too passive: 28...♜e2!, taking the initiative, should win cleanly.

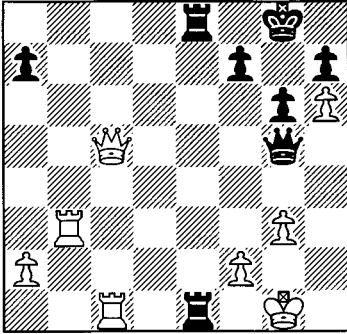
29 ♔c3 ♜g5 30 ♔d2 ♜d5 31 ♔c3 ♜ae8 32 ♔xd4 ♜xd4 33 g3 ♜d5 34 ♜b3?

34 ♜xc5! recovers the pawn due to a back rank trick (34...♜xf3? 35 ♜xe7! with a winning attack for White) and if 34...♜e1+ 35 ♔g2 equalizes.

34...♜g5 35 ♜xc5?

Too late, as the back rank trick is no longer on – see the following note. 35 ♜bb1 is necessary, when White can continue to struggle pawn down.

35...♜e1+!



36 ♔g2

A rook goes. No doubt White missed the diagonal move backwards in the variation 36 ♖xe1 ♖xe1+ 37 ♔g2 ♜xc5 38 ♖b8+ ♜f8!.

36...♜xc1 37 ♜d4 ♜c6+ 38 ♖f3 ♖1e5 39 g4 ♜e4 0-1

White did get a decisive result, if not exactly the one he was aiming for! In general, it's very dangerous to attack the Alekhine prematurely, as the counter-attacking nature of Black's play then comes strongly to the fore.

Game 23

D.Campora-I.Abreu Suarez

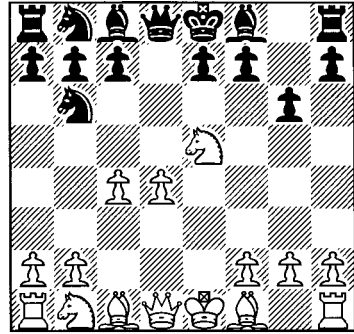
Las Palmas 1993

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 g6 6 c4

Very direct: White knocks the black knight out of the centre, but the dark side of the move is that the d-pawn (soon to be hit by the Kengis bishop) now lacks any pawn support. This variation should not be feared, though

Black must play very accurately over the next five moves or so.

6...♘b6



This position highlights one of the key differences between the Kengis and Carlsen Variations: in the latter (Black has played 5...c6 instead of 5...g6) Black answers 6 c4 with the aggressive 6...♘b4! (see Game 32 – note that White has no check on a4), but here Black must be content with the typical Alekhine retreat to b6, since 6...♘b4?? would lose a piece to 7 ♜a4+ ♘c6 8 d5.

During Kengis' "trial and error" days (actually just the error part – this is one of his first four losses) he tried another knight retreat, 6...♘f6, but after 7 ♘e2 ♘g7 8 ♘c3 0-0 9 ♘f4 c6 10 0-0 ♘a6 11 ♜d2 ♘f5 12 ♖ad1 ♜c8 13 ♘h6 ♜c7 14 ♘xg7 ♜xg7, he had no dark-squared bishop and no counterplay; soon... 15 f4 ♖ad8 16 g4 ♘c8 ...Black was in full retreat and was horribly crushed in S.Dolmatov-E.Kengis, Rostov on Don 1980. Another learning experience!

7 ♘c3

Alekhine Alert!

On 7 c5 Black should follow Larsen and gain time by offering to exchange with 7...d6d7, rather than going back to d5 which makes the knight a target:

a) 7...d5 8 e4 c6 9 d3 g7 and now, instead of 10 0-0 as in O.Kokar-Dausch, Bad Zurzach 1995, where Black eventually won, White should seize the advantage with the energetic 10 b3, which either wins a pawn or forces the weakening 10...e6.

b) 7...d6d7! 8 d3 g7 9 e4 0-0 10 0-0 b6 11 g5 b7 12 b3 e8 13 h3 h6 14 f3 h5 15 g3 a6 16 xa6 xa6 17 cxb6 cxb6 18 a3 f6 19 d3 c8 20 f4 d7 21 fe1 fe8 22 ad1 g4 and Black's careful play has fully equalized the game, G.Sax-S.Maus, German League 1994.

7...g7 8 e3

White's other 8th moves are ineffective:

a) 8 e2 c5 is clearly easier for Black than the game, as the white rook can't capture on d1, and the bishop on e2 (rather than e3) doesn't defend a white pawn on c5.

b) 8 f4 doesn't pay attention to the potentially weak d-pawn, and Kengis handled it easily, twice, against GM opposition. First he made a solid draw by simply exchanging White's active pieces: 8...0-0 9 e2 c6 10 d2 e6 11 b3 d8d7 12 e3 xe5 13 xe5 xe5 14 xe5 d7 15 e3 f6 16 0-0 1/2-1/2 P.Motwani-E.Kengis, Vienna 1991.

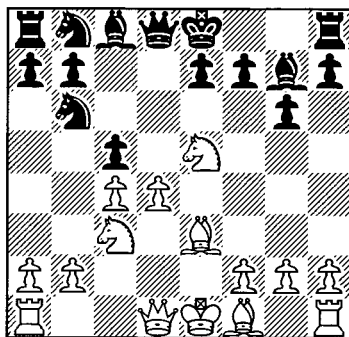
Seeking more a year later, Kengis let fly with 9...a5!? and had an almost im-

mediate success: 10 h4 dxc6 11 dxc6 bxc6 12 e5 xe5 13 dxe5 e6 14 b3 xd1+ 15 xd1 a4 16 e4 axb3 17 axb3 f5 18 d5 a5 19 d3 xd3 20 xd3 xe5+, when Black had won a pawn for nothing and thirty moves later scored the full point in J.Gallagher-E.Kengis, Bern 1992.

Of course White did not have to lose material like that (for example, 10 0-0 instead of the ineffective 10 h4, would have been better), but one sees that Black has counterplay and no problems in this variation.

c) Finally, if 8 f4 c5 9 dxc5 (9 e3 transposes to the note to White's 9th move) 9...d6d7 10 e3 a5 and Black wins his pawn back with a good game.

8...c5



I think this move (developed by Kengis after a few bad experiences) is the clearest path to equality, though the natural 8...0-0 is also playable. However, I can't recommend 8...dxc6 9 dxc6 bxc6 as, unlike in Gallagher-Kengis above, Black doesn't get a tempo off the d4-pawn, which White

wisely defended with 8 ♖e3. After 10 ♜d2 ♖e6 11 b3 0-0 12 ♖e2 ♜d7 13 0-0 ♜ad8 14 ♜ad1 Black runs out of play but the doubled pawns remain.

Returning to 8...0-0, one finds that the position is surprisingly little explored. It's easy to see that 9 ♜f3 is over-aggressive, just inviting a typical Alekhine counter-attack: 9...f6 10 ♜d3 e5 11 dxe5 fxe5 and the queen had to run back – White barely made a draw after 12 ♜d1 ♜c6 13 ♜c5 ♜e8 14 ♜d5 ♜f7 15 ♜e4 ♖f5 16 ♜g5 ♜d7 17 ♜xb6 ♜xd1+ 18 ♜xd1 axb6 19 c5 h6 20 ♖c4+ ♜h8 21 h4 b5 22 ♜f7+ ♜h7 23 ♜g5+ ♜h8 24 ♜f7+ ♜h7 25 ♜g5+ ½-½ J.Polgar-S.Agdestein, Isle of Lewis 1995.

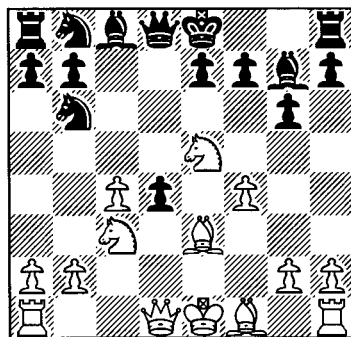
9 ♜c1 is another matter: Grischuk scored a high-level win against Alekhine expert Baburin with it, though I like the game Black got out of the opening: 9...c5 10 ♖e2 cxd4 11 ♖xd4 ♖h6 12 ♜a1 f6 13 ♜g4 ♖xg4 14 ♖xg4 ♜c6 15 ♖c5 ♜e5 16 ♖e6+ ♜g7 17 ♜d5 ♜xd5 18 cxd5 and now I think 18...♜c7! may be equal or better for Black. Instead, Baburin chose the unfortunate 18...♜a5+ which lost a tempo and then the game after 19 b4 ♜a6 20 ♜e2 ♜d3+ 21 ♜f1 ♜xc5 22 bxc5 ♜xe2+ 23 ♜xe2 b6 24 c6 etc, A.Grischuk-A.Baburin, Torshavn 2000. Of course after my suggested 18...♜c7 19 b4?! is met very strongly by 19...b6. But this variation remains untried at this writing.

9 dxc5

Again the premature attack 9 ♜f3

should not do anything for White (the positional pressure lines are more testing for Black): 9...0-0 10 0-0-0 ♜6d7 11 ♜g4 (White tries for an attack that's not there; better is 11 ♖e2 cxd4 12 ♖xd4 ♖xe5 13 ♖xe5 ♜xe5 14 ♜xd8 ♜xf3 15 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 16 ♖xf3 ♜c6 and Black should gradually equalize; e.g. 17 ♜d1 ♖e6 18 b3 ♜d8 19 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 20 ♜d2 ♜d7 21 ♜e3 e5 22 c5 f5 23 b4 ♜e7 24 ♜d5 g5 25 b5 ♜f6 26 a4 h5 27 a5 a6 28 bxa6 bxa6 29 ♖c4 ♜c6 30 ♜d5+ ♜g7 31 ♖xa6 ♜xa5 32 ♜b4 ♜f6 33 ♖e2 ♖e8 with a likely draw) 11...cxd4 12 ♖xd4 e5! 13 ♖e3 (taking on e5 loses a piece: 13 ♜xe5? ♜g5+ or 13 ♖xe5? ♖xe5 14 ♜xe5 ♜g5+) 13...f5 14 ♜d5+ ♜h8 15 ♜h6 ♜e7 (White's premature attack has rebounded – another case where prematurely attacking the King's came to no good for White) 16 h4 f4 17 h5 ♖xh6 18 hxg6 fxe3 (18...♜g7 looks simpler) 19 ♜xh6 ♜f6 20 ♜d3 exf2 21 ♜xh7+ ♜xh7 0-1 I.Popelyshev-Y.Prokopchuk, Moscow 2007.

Kengis himself faced 9 f4 cxd4



10 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 11 ♖xd4 ♜6d7 12

♠d5 ♠xe5 13 ♠xe5 (13 ♠c7+ ♠d8 14 ♠xa8 ♠f3+ 15 gxf3 ♠xd4 16 0-0-0 ♠c6 is very complicated but looks about even – Black is still tied up, but White’s knight has no way home) 13...♠xe5 14 fxe5 ♠a6 15 ♠e2 ♠e6 16 0-0 ♠c8 17 ♠ad1 g5 18 b4 h5! (an interesting idea: Kengis plans to develop the king’s rook to the third rank) 19 c5 ♠xd5 20 ♠xd5 ♠xb4 21 ♠b5+ ♠f8 22 ♠d7 ♠xc5 23 e6 f5 24 ♠xb7 ♠xa2 25 ♠d3 f4 26 h4 ♠c1 27 ♠a6 ½-½ A.Vitolinsh-E.Kengis, Latvian Ch., Riga 1989. I would play 27...♠h6 and refuse the draw with Black, though White should probably hold the material down ending with best play.

In a recent game I reached this 9 f4 cxd4 line by transposition, and my opponent took with the bishop: 10 ♠xd4 0-0 11 ♠e2 ♠e6 12 b3 and now, instead of 12...f6 when I was somewhat worse in G.Gonzales-T.Taylor, Philadelphia 2009 (because of the insecure bishop and weak square at e6), I should have remembered Larsen and played the non-stereotyped 12...♠xe5! 13 ♠xe5 (if 13 fxe5 ♠c6 wins a pawn) 13...♠c6, when Black catches the dark-squared bishop and has no further problems; e.g. 14 ♠xd8 (or 14 0-0?! ♠xe5 15 fxe5 ♠d7 16 ♠d4 ♠c7 17 ♠d5 ♠xd5 18 ♠xd5 ♠xe5 and Black wins a pawn) 14...♠fxd8 15 ♠c7 ♠d7 16 ♠xb6 axb6, which is similar to the 9 dxc5 main line where Black has a good game; e.g. 17 ♠a4 ♠ad8 18 ♠xb6 ♠d2 and the rook on the seventh provides

excellent compensation for the pawn.

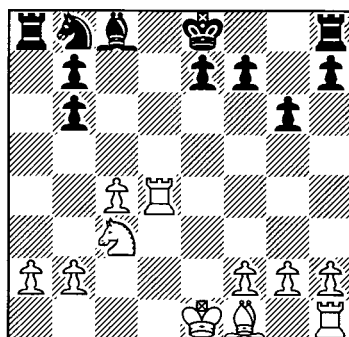
9...♠xd1+ 10 ♠xd1 ♠xe5 11 cxb6 axb6

11...♠xc3+ 12 bxc3 axb6 is weaker: Black should not give up the two bishops without provocation; e.g. 13 ♠d2 ♠d7 14 ♠e2 ♠c5 15 0-0 ♠f5 16 ♠f3 ♠e4 (even without this tactical error Black is worse – after 16...0-0 17 ♠e1, say, as the unopposed dark-squared bishop is a constant threat) 17 ♠xc5 ♠xf3 18 ♠d4 e5 19 ♠xe5 f6 20 ♠e1 fxe5 21 ♠xe5+ ♠f7 22 gxf3 ♠hc8 23 ♠d7+ ♠f6 24 ♠b5 ♠xc4 25 ♠xb6+ ♠g5 26 ♠xh7 ♠xc3 27 h4+ ♠f5 28 ♠f7+ ♠e5 29 ♠xg6 ♠xa2 30 ♠e7+ ♠d5 31 ♠d7+ ♠e5 32 ♠xb7 ♠xf3 33 ♠b5+ and White won the double rook ending despite the notorious f- and h-pawns in T.Ernst-V.Bagirov, Helsinki 1992.

12 ♠d4

But if White decentralizes his bishop, then the same capture works: 12 ♠xb6 ♠xc3+ 13 bxc3 ♠d7 14 ♠c7 ♠xa2 with a good game for Black – a chess quirk, as Bobby used to say.

12...♠xd4 13 ♠xd4



My two most recent Alekhine books

cover this position, but judge it incorrectly in my opinion. "White was much better," says Davies; and Cox says this position "is just better for White" – but I completely disagree, and for once I have Mr. Fritz on my side!

To me it's evident that after the coming ...♖c6 Black is at least equal: Black has the only centre pawn, play on the a-file, and can often post his knight powerfully on d4. Let's look at some variations. 13...♖c6 is obvious and best – now White has two reasonable rook moves.

a) 14 ♖d5 ♙e6 15 ♜b5 ♜a6 16 c5 ♙xa2 17 ♜xa2 ♜xa2 18 ♜xb6 ♜a7 19 ♙d2 ♙d7 20 ♙c4 ♙c7 21 ♙c3 ♜d8 22 ♜e1 (if 22 ♙xf7 ♜a5 23 b4 ♜a3+ 24 ♙b2 ♜ad3 25 ♜f1 ♜d2+ and Black will at least recover his pawn with some advantage) 22...e6 and the balance shifts to Black, since White can't do anything with the queenside pawns. After 23 b4 ♜e7 24 ♙b3 ♜d5+ 25 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 26 ♜e2 ♜a1 Black may start playing for a win, as the advanced white rook on b6 is out of the game.

b) 14 ♖d2 e5 and I just can't see any problems for Black, no matter how hard I look! Meanwhile White has to be careful in view of Black's active play (a-file, d4-square, kingside pawns): 15 b3 (15 ♜d5?! ♜xa2 is a little better for Black) 15...♙e6 16 ♙e2 (16 ♜a4 ♜b4 17 a3 b5 18 cxb5 ♙xb3 is a lot better for Black) 16...♙e7 17 ♙f3 ♜hd8 18 ♜xd8 (if 18 ♜d5+ ♙f8 19 0-0 b5! breaks successfully and Black takes over the ad-

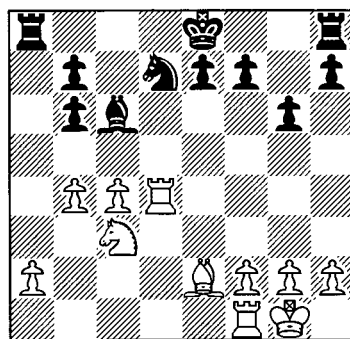
vantage, as 20 cxb5 is bad in view of 20...♜d4) 18...♜xd8 19 ♙xc6 (White tries to survive; 19 ♜b5 f5 is a clear plus for Black with his mobile kingside pawn majority) 19...bxc6 20 ♙e2 f5 21 ♜d1 and White is close to equal but not there yet – Black can legitimately play for a win with the superior minor piece.

Finally, Mr. Fritz goes to "=" as soon as I put in 13...♖c6, with the subsequent play showing a clear lean in Black's favour.

13...♙d7??

Astonishing! Instead of the natural developing and tempo-gaining 13...♖c6, Black takes two moves to deprive his knight of its natural square, and denies himself the tempo gain on the white rook! Such self-abnegation is not good for the soul!

14 ♙e2 ♙c6 15 0-0 ♜d7 16 b4



The badly-placed bishop is now a target. Black finds a tactical solution, but his loss of time still costs.

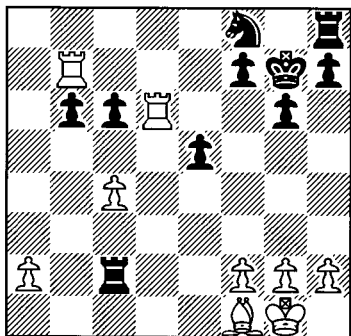
16...♜a3 17 b5 e5 18 ♜d2 ♜xc3 19 bxc6 bxc6 20 ♜fd1 ♜f8 21 ♜d8+ ♙e7 22 ♜b8

Alekhine Alert!

♖c2 23 ♙f1 ♜f6

23...♜xa2!? may be the best chance, planning to sacrifice a piece: 24 ♜dd8 f5 25 c5 bxc5 26 ♜e8+ ♔d6! (not 26...♜f7? 27 ♙c4+ forking) 27 ♜bd8+ ♜c7 28 ♜xf8 ♜xf8 29 ♜xf8 ♜a1, when Black has good practical drawing chances.

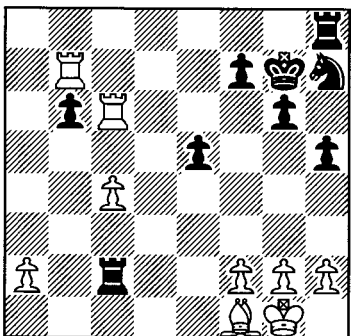
24 ♜d6+ ♜g7 25 ♜b7



25...h5?

Black gives up – 25...c5 is still a game.

26 ♜xc6 ♜h7?



27 ♜xg6+! 1-0

The fact that Black fell apart after a well-played opening should not affect

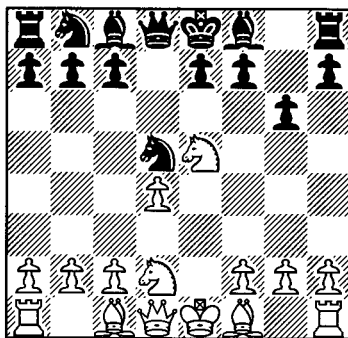
our evaluation of the position: Black shouldn't have any problems in the ending after the simple 13...♜c6.

This evaluation also supports Kengis' choice of 8...c5.

If you don't want to go straight to the ending, one might explore Baburin's 8...0-0, with more risky but perhaps rewarding play.

Game 24 N.Borge-B.Larsen Danish Championship, Aarhus 1999

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♜f3 dxe5 5 ♜xe5 g6 6 ♜d2



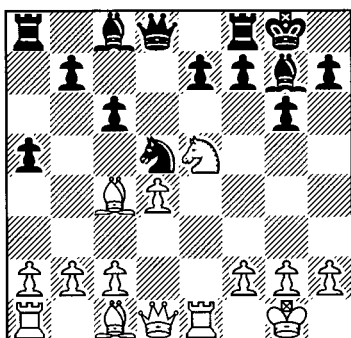
We have seen that 6 ♙c4 doesn't give much of anything, while the early attacks (6 ♜f3, 6 h4, 6 c4) fizzle out quickly against accurate play. Here Bent Larsen, 32 years after inventing this system (which would be named after someone else!) finds White playing a new plan: trying to maintain the knight at e5 by immediately support-

ing it with the other horse.

6...♗g7 7 ♖df3 0-0 8 ♙c4 c6 9 0-0 ♘d7 10 ♜e1

If White tries to keep both knights with 10 ♘d3, then Black exchanges one with his queen's bishop and reaches a typical Kengis equilibrium, as Kengis himself shows: 10...a5 11 a4 ♘7b6 12 ♙b3 ♙f5 13 ♜e1 ♙xd3 14 ♜xd3 e6, when Black is very solid and eventually drew in J.Amason-E.Kengis, Jurmala 1987.

10...♘xe5 11 ♘xe5 a5



Of course!

12 a4 ♙e6 13 ♜f3 ♜d6 14 c3 c5

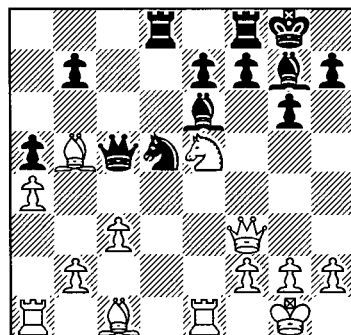
Having played through some games with this system, one can appreciate the clear strategical line of Black's play: Larsen has exchanged a minor piece and now gets in the key "diagonal softening" break and stands fully equal.

15 dxc5 ♜xc5 16 ♙b3

Finkel claims that White can get the advantage here with 16 b3, threatening ♙a3, but this fails tactically to 16...♘b6 when White has too many pieces hanging: e.g. 17 ♙xe6 (if 17 ♙e3

♜xe5 18 ♙xb6 ♜xc3, or 17 ♙a3 ♜c7 18 ♙xe6 ♙xe5 19 ♙h3 ♙xh2+ wins a pawn) 17...♙xe5 18 ♙e3 ♜xc3 19 ♙h3 ♘c8 20 ♜ec1 ♜xb3 21 ♜ab1 ♜xa4 22 ♜xb7 ♘d6 23 ♜xe7 ♜ae8 and Black stays a good pawn up.

16...♜ad8



Black has a successful Kengis. The problem for the practical player is that, even when one succeeds positionally in this variation, it's difficult to win if White plays cautiously.

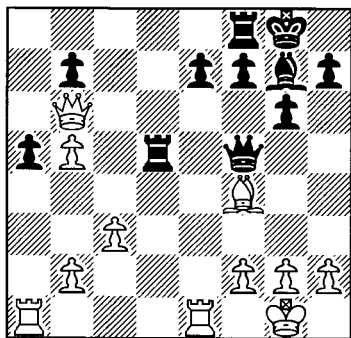
17 ♘d3 ♜c8 18 ♘f4 ♘xf4 19 ♙xf4 ♜d5 20 ♜e3 ♙d7 21 ♜b6?

21 ♜xe7 ♙xb5 22 axb5 ♜xb5, with a draw most likely, looks best. This kind of line is the unavoidable consequence of the opening and is the only knock on the Kengis system that I can see. Basically, if White plays one of the solid lines, such as this one and the two following, Black must generally be willing to take a draw.

And even if White makes a mistake, as here, it won't be that easy to win.

21...♙xb5 22 axb5 ♜f5!

Larsen picks off a pawn.



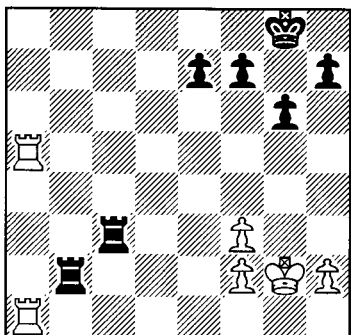
23 ♖xb7 ♜xb5 24 ♖f3 ♜xb2 25 ♙e5

I thought it was a myth that all rook endings are drawn – but maybe not!

25... ♖xf3 26 gxf3 ♙xe5

Now the dreaded 4 vs. 3 on the same side occurs, but it's not clear that Black has anything better; e.g. 26... ♜a8 27 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 28 ♜xe7 a4 29 ♜a3 and White holds.

27 ♜xe5 ♙d8 28 ♜exa5 ♜d3 29 ♙g2 ♜xc3



30 ♜5a3 ♜cc2 31 ♜f1 ♙g7 32 ♜d3 e6 33 ♜e3 ♜b5 34 ♜d3 ♜c4 35 h3 ♜g5+ 36 ♙h2 ♜h4 37 ♜h1 e5 38 ♜a3 ♜f4 39 ♜e1! ♜gf5 40 ♙g3 h5 41 ♜e4 h4+ 42 ♙g2 ♜xe4 43 fxe4 ♜f4 44 ♜a4 ♙h6 45 ♜a7

♙g5 46 f3 f5 47 ♜a5 ♙f6 48 ♜a6+ ♙g7 49 ♜a7+ ♙h6 50 exf5 gxf5 51 ♜a5 e4 52 fxe4 fxe4 53 ♜e5 ♙g6 54 ♜e6+ ♙f7 55 ♜e5 ♙f6 56 ♜e8 ♙f5 57 ♜e7 ♙f6 1/2-1/2

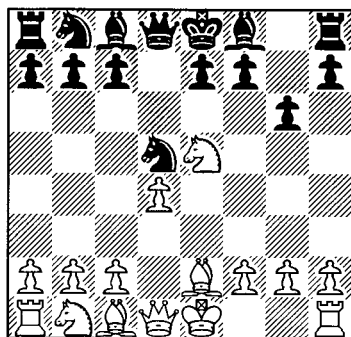
White defended well and made his draw. But we see that the ♜d2-f3 manoeuvre is too slow to give White anything – Borge could have drawn much sooner if he had recognized that, say on move 21.

Game 25

P.Acs-C.Horvath

Hungarian Championship,
Balatonlelle 2002

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♜f3 dxe5 5 ♜xe5 g6 6 ♙e2



We've seen the basic ideas of the Kengis, and we've seen how Black should play against the various rather primitive efforts at refutation. But what should *White* play? For the strongest players in the world, the over-2600 crowd, the answer is clear: first of all, the king's bishop should not

go to c4, where it is either exchanged by ...♙e6 (Kengis) or encircled by ...a7-a5 and possibly ...b7-b5 (Larsen, Agdestein). Yes, Kasparov played that way in Game 19 in 1997, but I'm sure if he came out of retirement now he would keep the bishop back. In general, White should avoid exchanges, and given that Black's standard breaks are ...c5 and ...e5, White should develop his bishop to the long diagonal (♙e2-f3 here, or g2-g3 and ♙g2 in the following game) so that when Black makes one of those freeing pawn moves, the bishop becomes stronger, as the d5-square is slightly weakened.

What does all this add up to? Plus equals at best, maybe even less than that – annoying pull might be the best description.

Very high-rated GMs don't need a lot to win: they are happy with such slight advantages and are willing to play all night with them. In this game, Peter Acs can't quite score the win, and Black defends well to make his draw; in the final game of this chapter, Mickey Adams comes very close to drawing with Vishy Anand, but in the end goes under.

If you play 2600 players on a regular basis, you can expect some suffering in the Kengis – not of the “my opening is unsound” variety but of the “I'm very slightly worse and I don't see any winning chances for me but I know I can make a draw with best play”, which doesn't sound too bad unless you are sitting across from Anand at the time!

On the other hand, this “patient grind” for White is virtually never played at club level; in my eleven games with the Alekhine's I have faced no such thing, despite three opponents over 2500. But I haven't tried the Alekhine against any 2600s yet!

6...♙g7 7 0-0 0-0 8 ♙f3

The patient approach: White puts his light-squared bishop on the long diagonal and waits. Horvath had no problems a few years before with a more impatient opponent: 8 c4 ♘b4 9 a3 ♘4c6 10 ♘xc6 ♘xc6 11 d5 ♘d4 (Black takes over the centre and stands well – the weakening side of the premature 8 c4 is seen) 12 ♙e3 c5 13 ♙xd4 cxd4 14 ♘d2 e6 15 dxe6 ♙xe6 and Black was better in M.Kober-C.Horvath, Croatian Team Ch. 1995.

8...c6 9 ♞e1 ♙f5 10 c3

Note White's solid set-up, while Black is a long way from managing either ...e5 or ...c5.

10...♘d7 11 ♘xd7 ♞xd7 12 ♘a3 b5

The following deceptively simple variation shows the poisonous nature of White's play: 12...♙e6 13 ♘c2 ♞fd8 14 ♘e3 ♘b6 15 ♘g4 c5 16 ♘h6+ (16 dxc5 ♞b5 is fine for Black, but wait one move!) 16...♙xh6 (unfortunately necessary, as 16...♙h8 17 dxc5 ♞b5 18 ♞c2 ♞xc5 19 ♞xe6! is much better for White, with a knight fork at f7) 17 ♙xh6 cxd4 18 ♞xd4 ♞xd4 19 cxd4 ♞xd4 20 ♙xb7 (the freeing ...c6-c5 opened the long diagonal for White!) 20...♞ad8 21 ♙g5 and White gets a

Alekhine Alert!

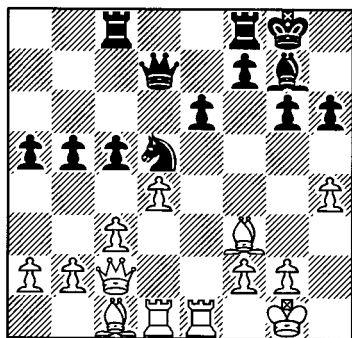
small but lasting pull without doing much of anything!

13 ♖c2 ♙xc2

A typical Kengis idea: Black exchanges a second minor piece, and uses pawns on light squares to compensate for the missing bishop, while preparing ...c6-c5. This just about – but maybe not quite – equalizes.

Also possible is 13...a5 14 ♖e3 ♖xe3 15 ♙xe3 a4 which looks very drawish, but one should note the *Fritz* evaluation here: the machine gives the “=” sign, but if you look at the numbers, White is up about 0.20. In other words, that very very slight pull for White, undoubtedly because c6 is slightly weak. I’m sure this is drawable, but I’m equally sure that Acs would have been happy to grind away in this position!

14 ♜xc2 e6 15 ♙g5 ♜ac8 16 ♜ad1 a5 17 h4 h6 18 ♙c1 c5



As always a key Kengis move, but now White’s light-squared bishop is that slight bit more active, as the centralized black knight is not quite as well supported.

19 dxc5 ♜xc5 20 ♜e2 ♜c7

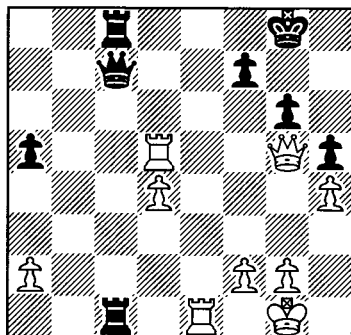
Black puts his faith in “all rook endings are drawn” since White practically has to exchange the bishops (see the next note). The alternative is 20...♜fc8, which is one of those “almost equal” positions. The problem is that White can make various efforts with his two bishops for a long time, while Black does not have much active play.

Black should not lose this, but he certainly won’t win unless White makes a serious blunder.

21 ♙xd5 exd5 22 ♙e3 ♜c4 23 ♜xd5 b4 24 ♙d4

Necessary, since 24 cxb4 ♜xh4 25 g3 ♜xb4 gets his pawn back with a good game.

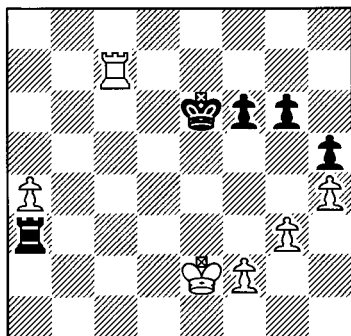
24...bxc3 25 bxc3 ♜c8 26 ♜e3 h5 27 ♜g5 ♙xd4 28 cxd4 ♜c1



29 ♜de5 ♜c3 30 ♜xc1 ♜xc1+ 31 ♜xc1 ♜xc1+ 32 ♙h2 a4

There you have it! Black was probably aiming for this position, or something like it. Black has the active rook which can get behind White’s pawns – but he is a pawn down for good.

33 ♖c5 ♗a1 34 ♖c2 ♕f8 35 ♖g3 ♕e7 36
 ♕f3 ♕d6 37 ♕e3 ♖b1 38 ♖c4 a3 39 ♖c3
 ♖e1+ 40 ♕f3 ♖d1 41 ♖xa3 ♖xd4 42 g3
 ♖d2 43 ♕e3 ♖b2 44 ♗a7 ♕e6 45 a4 f6
 46 ♖c7 ♖b3+ 47 ♕d2 ♖f3 48 ♕e2 ♗a3



Perhaps White missed a chance somewhere, but now we see that Black has reached a theoretical draw, as given in all endgame books: the black rook is behind the passed pawn, and while it keeps close watch on the “dangerous criminal”, Black uses his king to get counterplay on the other side.

It’s not such an easy draw – but GM Horvath makes it look that way!

49 ♖c4 g5 50 ♕f1 ♕f5 51 ♖g2 ♗a2 52
 ♖c5+ ♕g4 53 hxg5 fxg5 54 a5 h4 55
 ♖c4+ ♕f5 56 g4+ ♕e5 57 ♖c5+ ♕f4 58
 ♖c4+ ♕e5 59 ♖c5+ ♕f4 60 ♖c4+ ½-½

A great defensive effort by Horvath, which shows the difficulty not so much of the Kengis itself, but in general of playing Black at the highest level, against well-prepared GMs.

There is a problem with the Kengis Variation that should not be ignored:

the solidity and quietness of the opening give almost no winning chances, if White plays the best lines.

This might not be to everyone’s taste, but I’d like to make two points: one, you probably won’t face Acs/Anand-style play unless you actually play one of those top guys, in which case your chances of drawing with the Kengis are as good as in any other opening; and two, if you play an opening with sharp counter-chances – let’s say the currently hot Dragadorf Sicilian – you will have to know reams of ever-changing theory just to stay alive – while the Kengis positional ideas are easy to learn and will stand you in good stead for years (as opposed to a new super-sharp Sicilian variation that might crash and burn in days, if not weeks).

Game 26

V.Anand-M.Adams

Linares

(1st matchgame) 1994

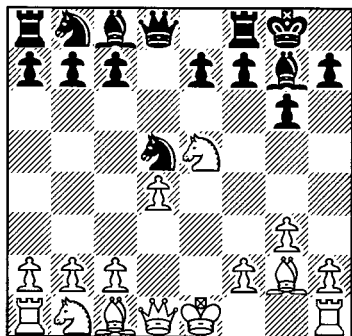
The World Champion and greatest foe of our defence gets the last word in this chapter: let’s just say in advance that this is *not* one of Anand’s two draws vs. the Alekhine.

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5
 ♖xe5 g6 6 g3!? ♖g7 7 ♖g2 0-0

7...♖b4 has never been tried but is worth a look: White should play 8 ♖f3 (8 ♖a3 ♖xe5 9 dxe5 ♖xd1+ 10 ♖xd1

Alekhine Alert!

♖8c6 11 c3 ♘d3 12 ♖b5 ♔d8 13 ♙e3 ♘cxe5 14 ♙c2 a6 is fine for Black) 8...♙f5 9 ♖a3 ♘8c6 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♘h4! ♚xd4 12 ♘xf5 gxf5 (not 12...♚xd1 13 ♘xe7+ and the zwischenzug gives White a clear plus) 13 c3 ♚xd1 14 ♚xd1 ♖a6 15 ♙e3, when White's raking bishops give him more than enough compensation for the pawn.



8 0-0 c6 9 ♚e1 ♙f5 10 c3

Again, the patient approach. 10 c4?! would be premature: 10...♖b4 11 ♖a3 (11 ♚e2 ♘xa2! is even worse) 11...a5! and Black has a good game with the white knight on a3 cut off from play – as we have seen before in a few games, notably Zapata-Tal, and will see again in Game 32.

10...♘d7 11 ♘f3 ♚e8

Black could continue similarly to Horvath with 11...♙xb1 12 ♚xb1 e6, but that was a hard draw.

12 ♘bd2 ♘7f6!?

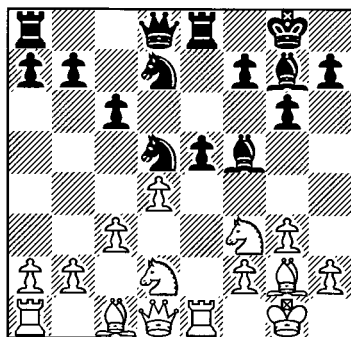
Black has two chances to bring the game in range of a draw, and this is the first – the other is on move 29.

By playing the text, Adams adopts a

waiting strategy to match White's, but must be tactically accurate in defence when Anand finally makes his move. From a pure chess point of view it's not a bad strategy, though prolonged defence is difficult psychologically.

I recommend the natural Kengis blow 12...e5 here, when Black gets his share of play. Even if the move doesn't 100% equalize, it's close enough, and gives Black a chance to act, rather than just react.

Let's look at a few lines with 12...e5! and then:



a) 13 dxe5 ♘xe5 14 ♘xe5 ♙xe5 15 ♘c4 ♙f6 16 ♚xe8+ ♚xe8 17 ♘d6 ♚e6 18 ♘xf5 ♚xf5 19 ♙h6 ♚d8 20 ♚e2 ♙g7 21 ♙xg7 (if 21 ♙d2 ♚c2 with counter-play) 21...♙xg7 22 ♚d1 ♚d7 and it's worth taking a good look at this position. White has the better minor piece, but the centralized knight almost matches the strong fianchettoed white bishop. Other things are about equal, and the pawn structure is symmetrical. So White has the tiniest of pulls – but he does have it. While *Fritz* is convinced

the position is equal, I think most players with White would try their luck for a while, as White has no losing chances, while if Black makes a mistake (let's say somehow weakens that b7-c6 pawn block) then White could quickly gain the upper hand.

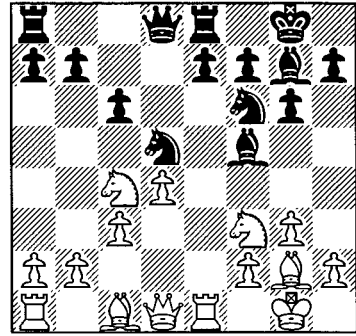
Sure, it's objectively a draw, but I see a couple of hours of hard play in Black's future, and then a draw in the end. Fun? No. Dramatic? No. But very solid and theoretically sound, even against Anand! Now one more line:

b) 13 ♖c4 ♙g4 (weaker is 13...♙c7 14 dxe5 ♙xe5 15 ♖cxe5 ♖xe5 16 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 17 c4 ♖b4 18 ♙f4 f6 as White damages Black's pawn structure) 14 dxe5 ♖xe5 15 ♖cxe5 ♙xe5 16 ♙b3 ♙xf3 (not 16...♙f6 17 ♙xb7) 17 ♙xf3 ♙b6! 18 ♙g5 (after 18 ♙xd5 cxd5 19 ♙xd5 ♙f6 Black's lead in development gives him excellent compensation for the pawn) 18...♙f6 19 ♙h6 (19 ♙xd5 ♙xb3 20 ♙xb3 ♙xg5 would be a way White could virtually force a draw, if he wanted it) 19...♙g7 20 ♙d2 and once again, though the pawns are symmetrical, the minor piece situation – here White has the two bishops – give White that little annoying pull.

Drawable? Certainly, but again a long defence with no real winning chances.

However, in both cases Black forces several exchanges and gets closer and closer to a clearly drawn position. I think the defence is easier in these lines than in the game.

13 ♖c4



White immediately prevents ...e7-e5. Black must now simply wait and watch for the moment to counter-attack – nerve-wracking against anyone, even more difficult against Anand.

13...♙c7 14 ♖ce5 ♖g4

When I first looked at this game, I thought this was a mistake as Black gets doubled pawns – but now I think it's correct. Black exchanges pieces, and the doubled pawns can be liquidated later.

15 ♖h4

Black can't move the f5-bishop as his knight on g4 hangs, but Adams gets two sets of minors off the board.

15...♖xe5 16 ♖xf5 gxf5 17 dxe5 e6

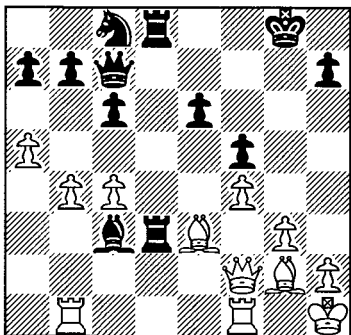
Not 17...♙xe5 18 ♙xd5 cxd5 (18...♙ad8? 19 ♙xf7+! destroys Black) 19 ♙xd5 winning the f-pawn.

18 ♙e2 ♖e7

White is minutely better, but Adams has blocked White's bishops and can break with ...f7-f6.

19 f4 ♖d5 20 c4 ♖e7 21 ♙e3 ♙ad8 22 b4 ♙d7 23 ♙f2 ♖c8 24 a4 ♙ed8 25 a5 f6

26 exf6 ♙xf6 27 ♖ab1 ♙c3 28 ♖f1 ♖d3
29 ♙h1



Now Black has his chance...

29...♙d4

...and misses it! Adams goes for a further exchange, but he should remember that the essence of the Alekhine is *counter-attack*. 29...♙d6 is correct, suddenly hitting the undefended c4-pawn. Since 30 c5 closes off the bishops and Black is better after 30...♙c4, White has to go into the complications of 30 ♙xa7, when a tactical slugfest occurs: 30...♙xc4 31 ♖a2 ♙d2 32 ♙b6 (weaker is 32 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 33 ♖xf7+ ♙xf7 34 ♙b6 ♙xb1 35 ♙xd8 ♙d2 36 ♖c1 ♙b3 and Black comes out the exchange ahead) 32...♖d7 33 ♙xd8 (if 33 ♖bd1, 33...♙xf1 34 ♖xd3 ♖xd3 35 ♖xe6+ ♙f8 36 ♙xd8 ♙e3 37 ♖e7+ is a draw) 33...♙xb1 34 ♖xb1 ♖xd8 35 b5 ♙xa5 36 bxc6 bxc6 37 ♙xc6 ♙c3 38 ♙f3 and amazingly enough, after all that, Black is *still* marginally worse because of his split kingside pawns – but certainly reasonable defence holds the draw.

30 ♙xd4 ♖3xd4?

30...♖8xd4 is correct, when best play looks like 31 ♖fe1 ♖d7 32 ♙f1 ♖d2 33 ♖e2 ♖d1 34 ♖xd1 ♖xd1 35 ♖e1 ♖xe1 36 ♖xe1 ♖d6 37 ♙g2 ♙e7 38 ♖c3 ♙g6 39 h4 and the often cited queen + knight superiority is not seen here, as Black has no attacking chances and can't get the knight to the only good outpost at e4 – in other words, in this specific position the queen + bishop battery is superior and Anand would have winning chances, though nothing like the game.

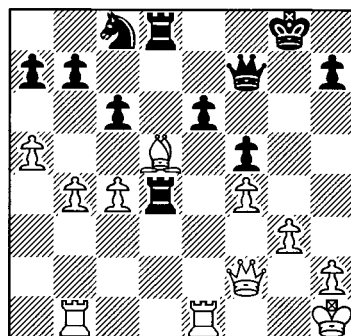
31 ♖fe1?!

31 ♙d5 should win, but for now, both sides overlook this tactic.

31...♖f7

Black is in trouble no matter what: 31...♖xc4 32 ♖xe6 ♖d7 33 ♖be1 ♖xb4 34 a6 bxa6 35 ♙xc6 is much better for White, while if 31...♖4d6 32 c5 and the e6-pawn goes.

32 ♙d5!



Finally! Now White wins the exchange, there are old and new files for the white rooks, and the black knight is

not playing – in short, a decisive advantage for White.

**32...♔g7 33 ♖e5! ♜4xd5 34 cxd5 cxd5
35 g4! ♜e7 36 ♖xe6 fxg4 37 ♔h4 ♜d7
38 ♖be1 ♜f8 39 f5 1-0**

If Black plays on, the finish is forced:
39...♜xf5 40 ♖f6+ ♜f7 41 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 42
♔d8+ ♜f7 43 ♖e7+ wins the queen.

It's hard to switch from defence to attack, and that's probably the reason Adams missed 29...♜d6.

I would have struck earlier with the Kengis-style 12...e5 and defended that very slightly worse but entirely tenable position.

Summary

The Kengis Variation is completely playable right up to World Championship level. As Kengis himself showed, his line can take down anyone from club players to 2500 GMs. Above that level, one needs precise play to make the draw with Black, and nothing more is rationally possible. The Kengis is a realistic line; Black must be willing to take some draws (see Game 21), but there are rich chances to outplay most of the foes you will actually meet, using the hard-earned strategical ideas of Kengis and Larsen.

Chapter Four

Modern Variation III: Vikings Board the Alekhine Longboat

Our Hero: Magnus Carlsen

Continuing the exploration of our repertoire in the critical Modern Line, after 1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 it's also possible to play 5...c6, currently favoured by Magnus Carlsen.

In this line Black is not committed to a kingside fianchetto – sometimes the bishop does come out this way, as we saw in Game 1, but it might also develop on the a3-f8 diagonal, usually e7 though sometimes d6. Another advantage, besides this flexibility, is that there is no potential check on a4, which can be important in early ...♘b4 lines.

On the other hand the disadvantage of 5...c6 is equally obvious: unlike 5...g6 it does not prepare to develop a piece.

5...c6 was first introduced to high-level play by the late GM Tony Miles, and it's often called the Miles Varia-

tion. The first game of the chapter shows a typical Miles strategy – but there are some difficulties associated with this line. Then Carlsen developed an important strategic improvement, and the remaining games of the chapter feature Carlsen's ideas, as well as two of his extremely high-level encounters: vs. Shirov and Anand.

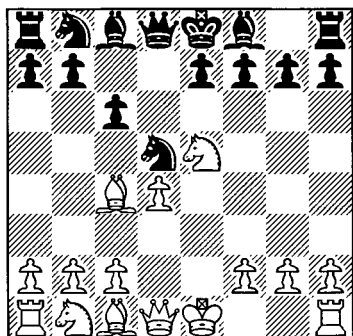
It is because of his deep improvements and new strategic ideas that I have named the new and improved 5...c6 variation after Carlsen.

Game 27

M.Casella-T.Taylor
Los Angeles 2004

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5

♞xe5 c6 6 ♙c4



This looks even more harmless here than in the Kengis – after all, the knight on d5 is already protected – but is still the most popular move for White, which I’ll examine in this and the next two games.

We saw 6 ♙d3 in Game 1 and I’ll take another look in Game 30. The direct 6 c4 is much weaker here than in the Kengis – see Games 31 and 32. The quiet 6 ♞d2 gives the same nothing – see Game 33; and while 6 g3 was dangerous vs. the Kengis, it’s not much with the pawn on c6 already blocking – see Game 34. Finally, the best move, approved by Kasparov and Anand, the poisonously quiet 6 ♙e2 (as in the Kengis, White does well to keep his king’s bishop back) will be covered in the final three games of this chapter – Games 35-37.

6 ♣f3, which led to a sharp draw vs. the Kengis (see Game 21), is one move that doesn’t deserve a full game. Here this crude approach gives less than nothing, as the diagonal to b7 is

blocked. Black just plays 6...♙e6 7 c3 (7 c4, analogous to said game, just loses a pawn here: 7...♞b4 8 ♣c3 ♣xd4!) 7...♞d7 8 ♙d3 g6 (a typical transposition from Carlsen to the Kengis, which is why I must again make the point that that the Alekhine player who wants to play Kengis or Carlsen must actually learn both, as they constantly transpose into each other) 9 0-0 ♙g7 10 ♞xd7 ♣xd7 11 h3 ♙f5! 12 ♞d2 (if 12 ♙xf5 ♣xf5 13 ♣xf5 gxf5 and the ending is good for Black who has the better bishop and the g-file) 12...♙xd3 13 ♣xd3 0-0 14 ♞f3 ♣fd8 15 ♙e1 ♣ac8 16 ♣e4 c5 and Black broke in classic Kengis style and went on to win in A.Abreu Delgado-A.Mirzoev, Padrun 2003.

6...♞d7

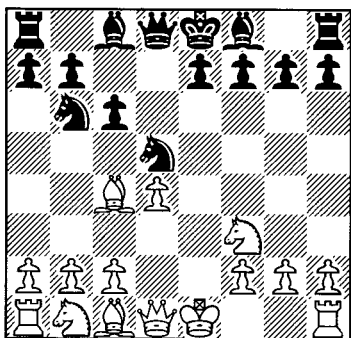
It’s worth quoting Larsen again: “the idea should be to win back the ‘lost’ tempo by exchange threats against the white knight.” This knight development characterizes both the old Miles and new Carlsen Variations, but it’s not the only move. The true lazy man’s line is 6...g6!?, transposing straight back to the Kengis, as we already know 6 ♙c4 is harmless against that.

· But don’t try the careless 6...♙f5? as you will be bopped on the head by the typical sac: 7 ♞xf7 ♙xf7 8 ♣f3, when White wins the piece back or generates a winning attack as in M.Boehnisch-H.Packroff, World Seniors Ch., Naumburg 2002.

7 ♖f3

The standard move: White tries to keep pieces on to accentuate his slight space advantage. A GM-GM encounter did feature 7 O-O, but after 7...♗xe5 8 dxe5 ♙f5 9 ♘d2 e6 10 a3 ♙e7 11 ♙a2 O-O 12 ♖b3 ♖c7 13 ♖e2 ♗ad8 Black was already a little better due to his strong knight on d5 in A.Yermolinsky-A.Shabalov, New York 1993.

7...♗b6



This is the older Miles variation, which is not at all bad, though Black has to be careful about his lightly protected kingside. Our next game features Carlsen himself playing the modern 7...♗f6 which covers the kingside more economically.

8 ♙b3 ♙g4 9 h3

The game K.Van der Weide-A.Miles, European Ch., Saint Vincent 2000, continued 9 ♘bd2 e6 10 O-O ♙e7 11 h3 ♙h5 12 c3 O-O 13 ♘e4 ♙g6 14 ♖e2 ♘d7 15 ♗e1 a5 16 a4 ♗e8 17 ♙c4 ♖c7 18 ♙g5 ♙xg5 19 ♘exg5 h6 20 ♘e4 ♗ad8 21 ♗ad1 ♗5b6 22 ♙b3 e5 23 ♘g3 e4 24 ♘h4 ♙h7 and now instead of 25

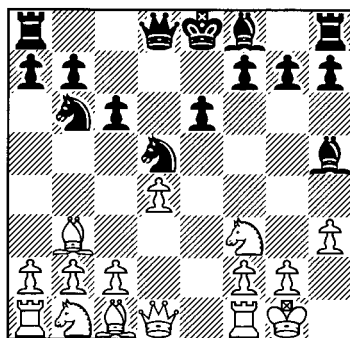
♖h5?! ♘f6! (when Black made up for his 7th move and held his kingside together, while offering White only a rather indigestible pawn on a5), White could have seized the advantage with 25 ♘h5!, which prevents ...♘f6 and gives White a very dangerous attack with the coming ♖g4.

In the main game I run into similar kingside problems – this is why, Carlsen style, we should put the knight on f6 on move 7!

9...♙h5

Note that in an analogous position from the Kengis, Black would have to exchange on f3 here, as the pawn on g6 would block a bishop retreat.

10 O-O e6



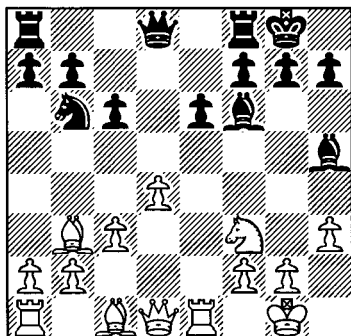
The king's bishop tries a different diagonal.

11 ♗e1 ♙e7 12 ♘bd2

After 12 c3 O-O 13 ♘bd2 ♖c7 14 ♘e4 ♗ad8 15 ♘g3 ♙g6 16 ♘e5 c5 Black got in this typical freeing move at the cost of the two bishops in S.Mannion-J.Shaw, Clarkston 2002. One should note that the bishop on e7 is more pas-

sive than on g7, so the ...c5 break doesn't do as much as in the Kengis – one sees there are slight advantages and disadvantages to both lines. As one might expect, in Mannion-Shaw White obtained a very slight advantage but the game was eventually drawn – whether Kengis or Carlsen, many well-played games in these variations end only in draws.

12...0-0 13 ♖e4 ♜f6 14 ♜xf6+ ♔xf6 15 c3



15...♝c7?

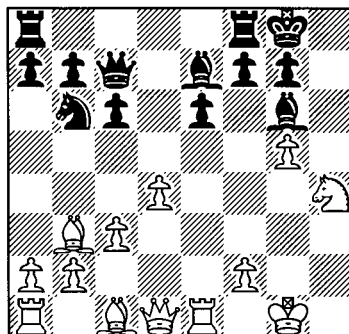
I simply underestimated the coming attack. The problem is that Black's only knight (remember 7...♞7b6) is far away from the kingside. Correct is 15...♙xf3! 16 ♝xf3 ♙g5, eliminating White's main attacking pieces (and clearing a square for ...♞d5-f6). This accurate defensive manoeuvre would leave White with only a marginal advantage – though it's true that Black would have no real winning chances and would have to aim consistently for the draw.

16 g4! ♙g6 17 h4!

There is already no good answer to

White's attack – Black needs a knight, not a bishop on f6.

17...h6 18 g5 hxg5 19 hxg5 ♙e7 20 ♞h4!



The b3-g8 diagonal blows up, White's light-squared bishop becomes very strong, and Black is much worse.

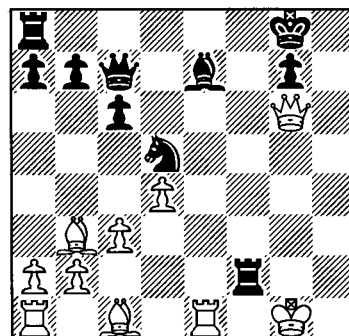
20...♙h7 21 ♝g4 ♞d5

Black can stop the following break with 21...g6, but then the h7-bishop is buried alive.

22 g6

White's plus is decisive, though I succeed in confusing the issue!

22...fxg6 23 ♝xe6+ ♜f7 24 ♞xg6 ♙xg6 25 ♝xg6 ♜xf2!



A great practical try, as 25...♔h4 26 ♔e3 just leaves White a pawn up for nothing.

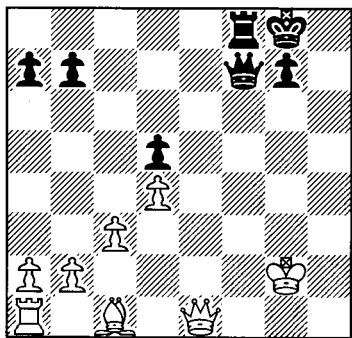
26 ♔xd5+!

White finds the correct solution ...for now! Worse is 26 ♖xf2 ♜h2+ 27 ♖f3 ♜f8+ 28 ♖e4 ♜h4+ 29 ♔f4 ♜f6 (not 29...♜xf4+? 30 ♖d3 ♜h3+ 31 ♖c2 ♜f2+ 32 ♖c1 when Black runs out of checks) 30 ♜e8+ (White must avoid 30 ♜g1? ♜h7+ 31 ♖f3 ♜d3+ 32 ♜e3 ♜xf4+ 33 ♖g3 ♜g6+ 34 ♖h2 ♜h4+ 35 ♜h3 ♔d6+ 36 ♖h1 ♜xh3+ 37 ♜h2 ♜xh2 mate) 30...♜f8 31 ♜g6 ♜f6 with a draw.

26...cxd5 27 ♖xf2 ♔h4+

Not 27...♜h2+? 28 ♖e3 ♜f8 29 ♜e2 ♜h3+ 30 ♖d2 and White escapes.

28 ♖g2 ♔xe1 29 ♜e6+ ♜f7 30 ♜xe1 ♜f8



30...♜e8 31 ♜g3 ♜e2+ 32 ♖g1 wins for White, but now Black threatens to win with 31...♜f3+ and 32...♜f5 – but there is an answer!

31 ♔f4?

I escape! The text blocks the mating attack, but only draws.

It was hard to see this over the

board, but White wins with 31 ♔g5!! ♜f3+ (or 31...♜g6 32 ♜g3 ♜c2+ 33 ♖h1 and Black is done) 32 ♖h2 ♖f7 (if 32...♜h5+ 33 ♜h4 ♜e2+ 34 ♖h1 ♜f3+ 35 ♖g1 wins) 33 ♜g3 ♜h8+ 34 ♔h4! (the key defensive block) 34...♜e2+ 35 ♖g1 and Black is doomed.

31...♜xf4 32 ♜e6+ ♜f7 33 ♜c8+ ♜f8

33...♖h7 34 ♜h1+ ♖g6 35 ♜e6+ also draws.

34 ♜e6+ ♜f7 35 ♜c8+ ½-½

Given the kingside dangers faced by Miles and myself, let's move on to the modern treatment with the knight on f6.

Game 28

A. Shirov-M. Carlsen

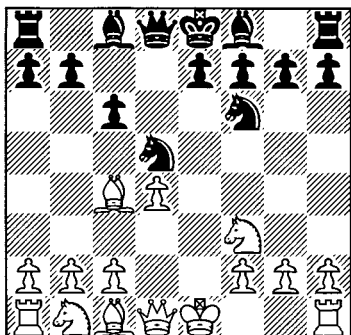
**World Blitz Championship,
Moscow 2007**

1 e4 ♖f6

I'm not a fan of blitz games in books, but this game and Game 36 are of such theoretical importance, and between such great players, that I had to include them.

2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5 ♖xe5 c6 6 ♔c4 ♖d7 7 ♖f3 ♖7f6

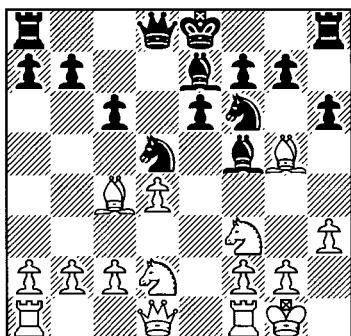
The modern way: Black secures his kingside against the kind of attack that occurred in the last game, and the queen's knight aims at the central square e4 rather than the easy tempo off the c4-bishop, which is probably somewhat misplaced anyway.



8 h3 ♖f5 9 0-0 e6 10 ♗g5

In the next game we'll see White wait with 10 ♗b3.

10...♗e7 11 ♘bd2 h6



12 ♗xf6?!

More logical is 12 ♗h4 when Black has three good choices:

a) He can go wild with 12...g5 13 ♗g3 ♘f4 14 ♖e1 ♖g8 with sharp counterplay.

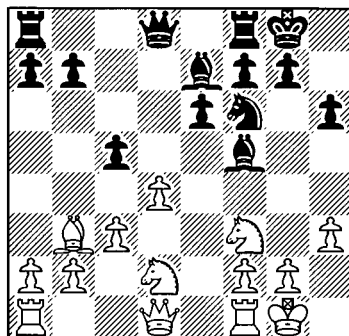
b) He can play it safe with 12...0-0 13 ♖e1 a5 14 c3 a4 15 a3 b5 16 ♗a2 ♗c7 with equality.

c) He can bore his opponent to death with 12...♘e4 13 ♗xe7 ♗xe7 14 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 15 ♖e1 ♗f5 with a dead

even Caro-Kann type position (though he could liven things up at the last minute with 15...♗xf3 16 ♗xf3 0-0-0!?).

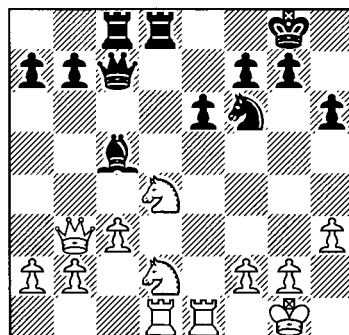
It's clear already that Black has no problems in the opening.

12...♗xf6 13 c3 0-0 14 ♗b3 c5



Not just a Kengis break, a Carlsen break as well! I don't know what the idea was behind the unforced surrender of the bishop pair, but Black is already comfortable and, after one slight error, will be clearly better.

15 ♗c2 ♗xc2 16 ♗xc2 ♖c8 17 ♗b3 ♗c7 18 ♖fe1 ♖fd8 19 ♖ad1 cxd4 20 ♘xd4 ♗c5



Now that Black has cleared off the

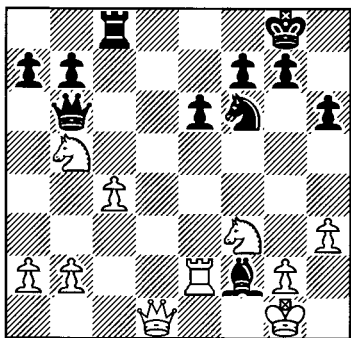
white centre, the dark-squared bishop (just as in the Kengis) assumes an active role, albeit on a different diagonal. In this case, the white king is at least slightly menaced.

21 ♖f3 ♜d5 22 c4!

Here's that second mistake: White weakens the key diagonal.

Correct is to play for a draw with 22 ♖b5 – not very Shirovian, but necessary. In every variation Black can repeat, but it's hard to find something more: 22...♞g3 (22...♞b6 23 ♖bd4 and 22...♞a5 23 ♜xd5 ♖xd5 24 ♖bd4 are similar) 23 ♖bd4 ♞d6 24 ♖b5 etc.

22...♜d7 23 ♖b5 ♞b6 24 ♜e2 ♜xd1+ 25 ♞xd1 ♙xf2+!!



Now White pays dearly for his two mistakes: the unforced exchange on f6 that ended up giving Black the only bishop, and 22 c4 that weakened the diagonal of said bishop. Now Black gets a rook and two pawns for two knights, and all the winning chances.

26 ♜xf2 ♖e4 27 ♞d4 ♞xd4 28 ♖fxd4 ♖xf2 29 ♙xf2 ♜xc4 30 b3 ♜c5 31 ♖xa7 ♜a5 32 ♖c8 ♜xa2+ 33 ♙g3 ♜b2 34 ♙f4

♜xg2 35 ♖d6 ♜d2 36 ♙e3 ♜h2 37 ♖xb7 ♜xh3+ 38 ♙e2 e5 39 ♖f3 e4 40 ♖d2 f5

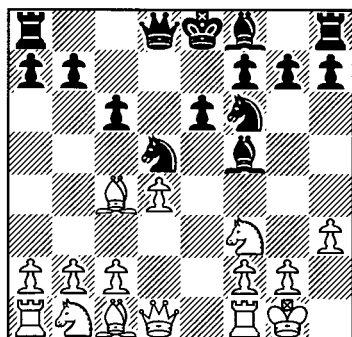
The black army ants begin an unstoppable advance.

41 b4 f4 42 ♖d6 ♜h2+ 43 ♙e1 e3 44 ♖f3 ♜b2 45 b5 g5 46 ♖e5 h5 47 ♖d3 ♜b3 48 ♖c5 ♜b1+ 49 ♙e2 h4 50 ♖e6 h3 0-1

One sees from this game that the “active” development of White’s bishops – ♙c4 and ♙g5 – is not dangerous for Black; indeed, White has to be careful, as slight errors can be fatal.

Game 29 I.Smirin-H.Nakamura Philadelphia 2009

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5 ♖xe5 c6 6 ♙c4 ♖d7 7 ♖f3 ♖7f6 8 h3 ♙f5 9 0-0 e6



10 ♙b3

We saw in the previous game that the “active” 10 ♙g5 led to nothing or less, so Smirin waits, looking especially to see which side Black will castle.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fritz has an interesting suggestion: the evil one gives 10 ♖d3 as its number one pick, which is completely illogical to human eyes, but has a computer point to it: Black's light-squared bishop is stronger than White's, so exchange! But in fact this is the best move, then 6 ♖c4 makes no sense whatsoever.

Another alternative could be risky: 10 ♘h4 ♕g6 11 ♖xg6 hxg6, since Black might play as in some lines of the Caro-Kann with ...♖c7 and ...0-0-0, with attacking possibilities down the h-file.

10...♗d6

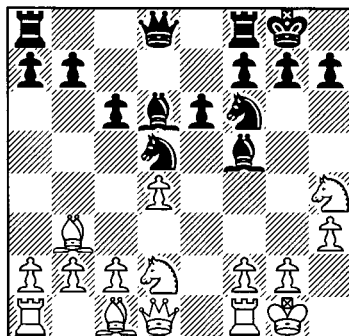
Black has an active development and nothing to fear.

11 ♘bd2

White also got nothing with the seemingly more active 11 c4 in S. Kindermann-S. Loeffler, German League 2007: 11...♗e7 12 ♘c3 h6 13 ♗c2 – I have to interrupt the game here to note that White just spent three moves to exchange the bishops (♗c4-b3-c2) – maybe Fritz was right! In any case such slow manoeuvres can't hurt Black, and once again one sees that keeping the light-squared bishop back is White's most dangerous weapon. After 13...0-0 14 b3 ♖a5 15 ♗b2 ♜fd8 16 ♖e2 ♗xc2 17 ♖xc2 ♖f5 18 ♖xf5 ♘xf5 Black had no problems and went on to draw.

11...0-0 12 ♘h4

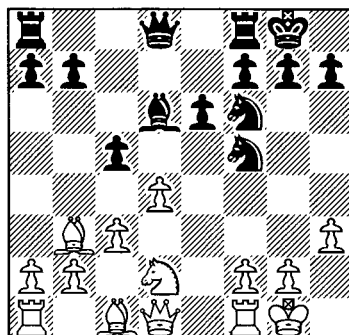
Now that Black has castled, White can play this safely; he expects 12...♗g6 but Nakamura shows a new idea.



12...♗e7! 13 ♘xf5 ♘xf5

Black's repositioned knight is ideally placed to pressurize the white centre.

14 c3 c5! ½-½



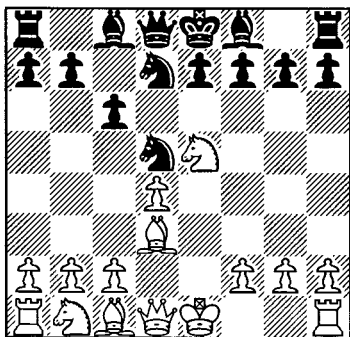
The GMs took their quick draw, but... Black is certainly at least equal, I would say a little better. Here are some sample (unforced) variations that come to Black's advantage. Maybe White can hold, but it's not good that White must be looking for a draw by move 14!: 15 dxc5 (after 15 ♘f3 ♖a5 16 ♖d3 ♜ad8 17 d5 b5 18 c4 bxc4 19 ♗xc4 ♘xd5 20 ♗xd5 ♗e7 Black wins a pawn) 15...♗xc5 16 ♖f3 ♖c7 17 ♘c4 (if 17 ♘e4?, 17...♗xe4 18 ♖xe4 ♘g3 wins the

exchange) 17...♖d5 18 ♘e3 ♗dxe3 19 ♙xe3 ♙xe3 20 fxe3 ♜ad8 21 e4 ♗g3 22 ♜fe1 ♞e5 23 ♜e3 ♗h5 and Black is slightly better in view of White's isolated e-pawn.

It's evident that 6 ♙c4 is harmless against either the Kengis or Carlsen Variations.

Game 30
J.Kleiman-A.Ramirez
Chicago 2007

1 e4 ♗f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3 dxe5 5 ♗xe5 c6 6 ♙d3 ♗d7



In general in the Kengis/Carlsen lines, this move should win a tempo, as White usually retreats back to f3. Black also gains if White takes on d7 (Game 1) as the exchange develops Black and eases his slightly cramped position.

If White doesn't retreat, as here, Black should be able to equalize by exchanges (recall the Shabalov game – note to move 7 in Game 27).

7 0-0 ♗xe5 8 dxe5 ♗b4 9 ♙e4 ♞xd1 10

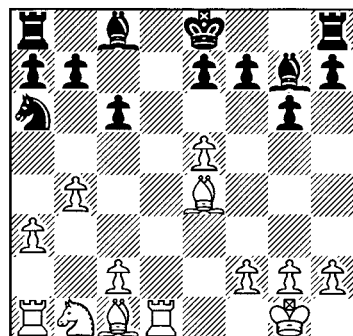
♜xd1 g6

Black should not lash out like the young Carlsen: after 10...f5?! (depriving Black of a later ...f7-f6 break – pawns can't move backwards!) 11 a3 ♗a6 12 ♙f3 g6 13 ♗d2 ♙e6 14 ♙e2 ♗c7 15 ♗f3 ♙d5 16 ♗d4 ♙g7 17 c4 ♙f7 18 f4 Black was cramped and eventually lost in E.Sutovsky-M.Carlsen, European Club Cup, Rethymnon 2003.

11 a3 ♗a6 12 b4

Black can *gradually equalize* (as Morozevich has advised in similar positions) after 12 ♙e3 ♙g7 13 f4 0-0 14 ♗c3 ♗c7 15 ♜d3 ♙e6 (patience! Fritz wants the wild 15...g5, but after 16 g3 this weakens Black more than White) 16 ♜ad1 f6! (the key break that Carlsen never had) 17 exf6 ♙xf6 18 g3 ♜fe8 19 ♙d4 ♗f7 20 ♗g2 ♜ed8 21 h3 ♙f5 22 ♙xf5 gxf5, when Black was solid and eventually drew in A.Jurkovic-H.Taracjija, Bosnjaci 2004.

12...♙g7



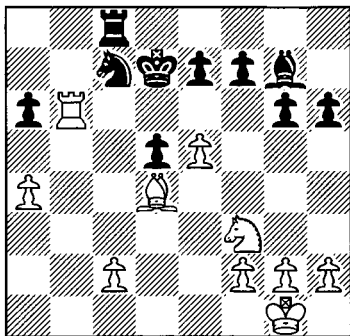
White seems to be better, and the computer evaluates it as such ...but there's nothing tangible. Black can

slowly prepare the key break with ...f7-f6. The young, but very strong Costa Rican GM shows how it's done.

13 ♖b2 ♜c7 14 ♞d2 ♙g4 15 ♜f3 ♜d8

Black's king needs to be in the centre to defend his position. He could lose after the natural but dubious 15...0-0 16 h3 ♙e6 (16...♙xf3 17 ♙xf3 is about the same) 17 ♞g5, when White gets the two bishops and something to play for.

16 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 17 ♞g5 ♙e8 18 a4 h6 19 ♜f3 ♙e6 20 b5 ♙d5 21 ♙xd5 cxd5 22 ♙d4 a6 23 bxa6 bxa6 24 ♜b1 ♙d7 25 ♜b6 ♜c8



26 c3

The trick 26 e6+ fails to 26...♞xe6 27 ♜xe6 ♙xd4! 28 ♜xa6 ♜xc2.

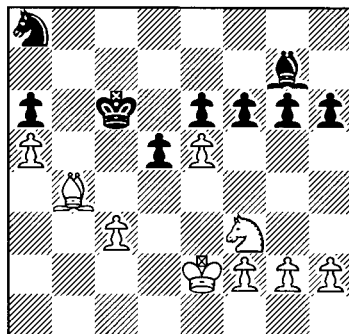
26...♞xe6 27 ♙f1

Not 27 ♜xa6 ♞xd4 28 ♞xd4 ♙xe5 and Black breaks through on the long diagonal, Kengis style.

27...♙c6 28 ♜b7+ ♙d8 29 ♜a7 ♞c7 30 ♜b7 ♙c8 31 ♜b6 ♜xb6 32 ♙xb6 ♙b7 33 ♙c5 e6 34 ♙e2 ♞a8 35 a5 ♙c6 36 ♙b4 f6!

Did I say "slowly prepare" back on move 12? The time is now! Black fully

equalizes and soon takes over the initiative.



37 ♞d4+ ♙d7 38 exf6 ♙xf6 39 ♙d3

Correct; White must allow the ...e6-e5 advance, for if 39 f4? ♙xd4! 40 cxd4 ♞c7 41 ♙d3 ♙c6 42 ♙c3 ♙b5 43 ♙b3 ♞e8 and Black has winning chances with the superior minor piece.

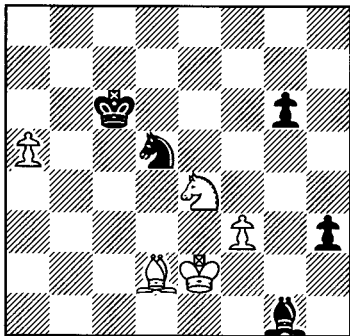
39...e5 40 ♞c2 ♞c7 41 c4 ♙c6

After 41...e4+ Black is a shade better but not enough to win; e.g. 42 ♙e3 dxc4 43 ♙xe4 ♙c6 44 ♞d4+ ♙xd4 45 ♙xd4 ♙b5 46 ♙d2 h5 47 f3 ♞e6+ 48 ♙d5 ♞c5 49 g4 ♞b3 50 ♙e1 ♞xa5 51 gxh5 gxh5 52 ♙xa5 ♙xa5 53 ♙xc4 ♙b6 54 ♙b4 h4 55 h3 ♙c6 56 ♙a5 ♙d6 57 ♙xa6 ♙e5 58 ♙b6 ♙f4 59 ♙c5 ♙xf3 60 ♙d4 ♙g3 61 ♙e3 ♙xh3 62 ♙f3 and draws.

42 cxd5+ ♞xd5 43 ♙c4 ♙d8 44 ♙d2 h5 45 f3 ♙c7 46 ♞e1 ♞f6 47 ♞d3 e4 48 ♞c5?!

48 fxe4 ♞xe4 49 ♙f4 ♙xa5 50 ♞e5+ ♙b7 51 ♞xg6 ♙d8 is a dead draw.

48...exf3 49 gxf3 ♙xh2 50 ♞xa6 ♞d5 51 ♞c5 h4 52 ♞e4 ♙g1 53 ♙d3 h3 54 ♙e2



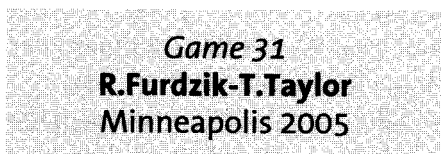
54...d7

54...h2 55 d3 d7 56 f1 f5 57 h1 h4 58 f4 b5 59 g3 dxf3 60 g2 d4 61 xh2 e3 62 f2 xa5 63 d3 should also be drawn.

55 f1 h2 56 g2 f5 57 f4 h4+ 58 h1 xf3 59 g5 xg5 ½-½

After 59...xg5 60 xg5 b5 61 f4 xa5 62 xh2 xh2 63 xh2 b5 64 g3 c5 65 g4 d6 66 g5 the last pawn goes.

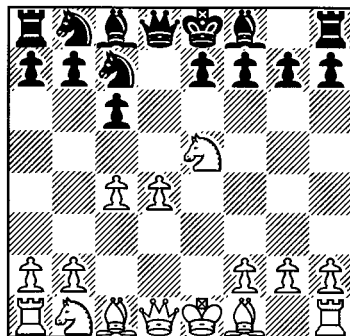
The GM had to settle for a draw, but that's the nature of many of these positions. 6...d7 has an exchanging threat – but the “threat” is only to equalize, not obtain the advantage. If White allows the exchange, as here – not a very ambitious policy – the position tends to level out without great winning chances for either side.



1 e4 d6

In the previous game we saw White play a quiet line and gradual equalization ensued. The much higher rated player could not win due to the drawish nature of the position. Fortunately, this is not the only kind of Alekhine's experience you will have. Many people simply believe the defence is unsound, and will attempt – as my opponent does in this game – to wipe it off the board! Then the Alekhine comes into its own as a counter-attacking system. In general, the harder White plays for a quick win, the better *Black's* winning chances are!

2 e5 d5 3 d4 d6 4 f3 dxe5 5 xe5 c6 6 c4 c7



6...b4 is sharper and stronger – see the next game. But this retreat perhaps emboldened my opponent to “refute” my “bad opening” right now!

7 c3 g6

Note that what started as a Carlsen is now more of a Kengis.

8 e3 g7 9 f4

This go for broke move is just what the Alekhine player wants – now we

can counter-attack!

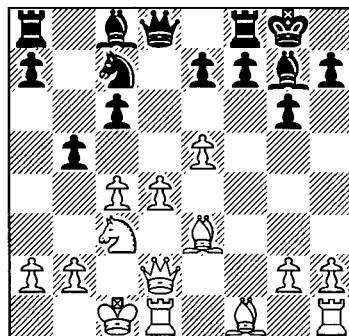
On the other hand, the following two GM vs. GM encounters feature a different, and far more terrifying strategy than bluntly playing for mate: White goes for the dreaded plus equals and squeezes. In one of the games, GM Tseshkovsky makes a draw after careful defence; in the other, GM Miles impatiently sacrifices his queen and is mercilessly ground down over many moves. I'll face the kingside attack any day!

a) 9 ♠e2 ♠d7 10 f4 0-0 11 0-0 ♠xe5 12 dxe5 ♠xd1 13 ♠axd1 f6 14 exf6 exf6 15 ♠f3 ♠e8 16 ♠f2 ♠a6 17 ♠e4 f5 18 ♠d6 ♠d8 19 b3 ♠f8 20 ♠xc8 ♠dxc8 21 g4 fxg4 22 ♠xg4 ♠c7 23 ♠d4 ♠c5 24 ♠xc5 ♠xc5 25 ♠fe1 ♠f8 26 ♠g3 ♠g7 27 ♠e3 ♠a6 28 c5 ♠b4 29 a3 ½-½ S.Dolmatov-V.Tseshkovsky, Russian Team Ch. 2001.

b) 9 ♠e2 0-0 10 0-0 c5 11 ♠f3 cxd4 12 ♠xd4 ♠h6 13 ♠c5 ♠c6 14 ♠d5 ♠e8 (the dreaded plus equals!) 15 ♠b3 e6 16 ♠e3 ♠a6 17 ♠fd1 ♠xc5 (or 17...♠a5 18 ♠d6 with annoying pressure; but now White gets a technical position with a material advantage – one sees a long grind coming!) 18 ♠xd8 ♠xd8 19 ♠a3 b6 20 b4 ♠e4 21 c5 bxc5 22 bxc5 ♠g7 23 ♠c1 ♠b7 24 ♠d3 ♠f6 25 ♠a6 ♠ab8 26 ♠xb7 ♠xb7 27 g3 ♠d5 28 ♠c4 ♠db8 29 ♠g2 h6 30 ♠a4 ♠de7 31 ♠c2 ♠b4 32 ♠a3 ♠b5 33 ♠d6 ♠a5 34 ♠d3 ♠d5 35 a3 ♠b8 36 h4 ♠a4 37 ♠c4 ♠xc4 38 ♠xc4 ♠b2 39 ♠a4 ♠de7 40 ♠b5 a5 41 ♠d6 ♠b8 42 ♠c4 ♠f6 43 ♠h2 ♠d4

44 ♠f3 ♠f6 45 ♠b5 ♠d8 46 ♠f4 ♠g7 47 ♠d6 ♠f8 48 g4 ♠b2 49 ♠d2 ♠a1 50 ♠c1 ♠d4 51 ♠xd4 ♠xd4 52 ♠c3 ♠ec6 53 ♠c4 ♠a8 54 ♠e5 ♠g8 55 ♠xc6 ♠xc6 56 ♠d3 ♠d8 57 ♠a6 ♠e7 58 ♠xa5 ♠d4 59 ♠g3 ♠d5 60 ♠b5 ♠d1 61 ♠b8+ ♠g7 62 c6 ♠d2 63 ♠b3 ♠d4 64 a4 h5 65 gxh5 gxh5 66 c7 ♠g4+ 67 ♠h3 ♠xc7 68 ♠c3+ ♠g8 69 ♠xc7 ♠xa4 70 ♠d8+ ♠h7 71 ♠g5 ♠a3+ 72 ♠h2 ♠d3 73 ♠xh5+ ♠g7 74 ♠g5+ ♠f8 75 h5 ♠d5 76 ♠g4 ♠f5 77 h6 ♠xf2+ 78 ♠g1 ♠f6 79 ♠g7+ ♠e7 80 h7 1-0 Gil.Hernandez-A.Miles, Linares, Holland 1994.

9...0-0 10 ♠d2 ♠d7 11 0-0-0 ♠xe5 12 fxe5 b5!



The counter-attack begins! This is a very common Alekhine break, often as a pawn sacrifice, when White sets up the centre with c4 and d4.

Here it turns out that the white king is not so safe either. Note that the position of the knight on c7 (allowed by the early c-pawn move) makes this move possible, as opposed to positions with the knight on b6.

13 h4

Alekhine Alert!

Accepting Black's sacrifice is too dangerous: 13 cxb5 cxb5 14 ♖xb5 (or 14 ♙xb5 ♖xb5 15 ♖xb5 ♙f5 with a tremendous attack against White's cut off king) 14...♖xb5 15 ♙xb5 ♔d5 and White has no good answer to the double attack on b5 and a2.

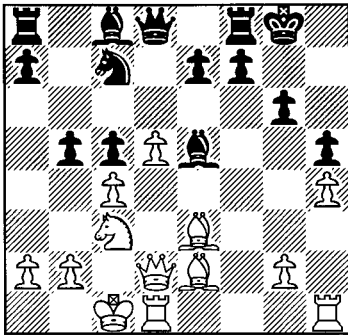
13...h5 14 ♙e2 c5

14...bxc4 15 g4 ♙xg4 16 ♙xg4 hxg4 17 h5 looked dangerous for me, so I blew up White's centre with this typical Kengis counter.

15 d5

Stronger is 15 ♙f3! ♖b8 16 dxc5 ♔xd2+ 17 ♔xd2 bxc4 18 c6 with a better endgame for White, but that was not the sort of game my opponent wanted.

15...♙xe5



Black has cleared the long diagonal and has counterplay, if perhaps not full equality yet. One sees how this theme of prying open the long diagonal occurs over and over – if you keep such positional ideas in mind, you are already halfway there toward learning this opening.

16 ♙xc5

After 16 cxb5 ♙b7 17 ♙xc5 ♖c8 Black has compensatory play against the king.

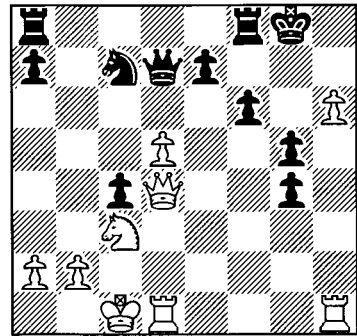
16...bxc4 17 g4

Optimistic! White is true to himself and plays for attack, though 17 ♙xc4 with equality is simpler.

17...♙xg4 18 ♙xg4 hxg4 19 h5 ♔d7 20 ♙d4

White misses his chance! 20 ♔e3!, attacking the bishop and eyeing h6, is very dangerous.

20...♙xd4 21 ♔xd4 g5 22 h6 f6



This was nerve-wracking to defend, but there's still no mate!

23 d6 exd6 24 ♙e4 ♔e7 25 ♙xd6 ♙e6!

The first of three strong counter-attacking moves by the Alekhine knight!

26 ♔d5

Since 26 ♔xc4 ♔c7 27 ♔xc7 ♖xc7 28 ♔dg1 ♔ad8 29 ♖f5 ♔fe8 ends in Black's favour, White continues to throw everything at my king.

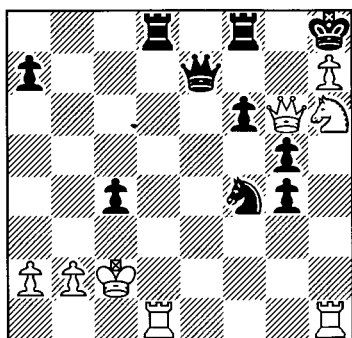
26...♔ad8 27 ♖f5 ♔f7 28 h7+ ♔h8 29 ♖h6 ♔e7 30 ♔f5 ♖d4!

And here's the second counterblow. In the following variation one might think White has a mating attack against the trapped black king, but Black's counter comes first! 31 ♖xd4 ♗xd4 32 ♜g6 (threatening ♜g8+ and mate) 32...♜e3+ 33 ♔c2 (33 ♔b1 ♜d3+ gets the queens off and Black wins) 33...♞d2+ 34 ♔c1 ♞h2+! and Black mates.

31 ♜g6

The game reaches its crisis: White has a passed pawn on the seventh and a seemingly irresistible attack – but all is maya, as only the Alekhine counter-attack is real.

31...♞e2+ 32 ♔c2 ♞f4!!



Completing the loop with the third crushing knight move. Black is better as the white attack falls just short: 33 ♞f7+ ♞xf7 (but not 33...♜xf7?? 34 ♜xf7 and White wins as the back rank collapses and the passed h-pawn goes through) 34 ♜xf7 ♜e4+ 35 ♔c3 (or 35 ♔c1 ♞e2 mate) 35...♜e5+! (the black queen gains room to manoeuvre on the fourth rank and the white king is hope-

lessly exposed: mate is forced) 36 ♔c2 (if 36 ♔xc4 ♞c8+ and Black mates in seven) 36...♜f5+ 37 ♔c3 ♞e2+ 38 ♔xc4 ♞c8+ 39 ♔b4 ♞b8+ 40 ♔a4 (or 40 ♔c4 ♜b5 mate) 40...♜b5+ 41 ♔a3 ♜b4 mate.

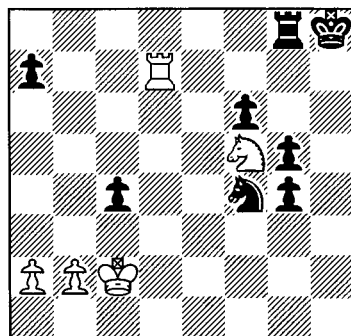
33 ♜g8+

There is nothing else.

33...♞xg8 34 hxg8♜+ ♞xg8 35 ♞f5+ ♜h7

The defence rests!

36 ♞xh7+ ♔xh7 37 ♞d7+ ♔h8



38 ♞xa7

Black wins beautifully after 38 ♞h6 g3 39 ♞xg8 ♔xg8 (but not 39...g2?? 40 ♞xf6 with a terrible reversal!) 40 ♞d1 g2 41 ♞g1 ♔f7 42 ♞d2 ♔e6 43 ♔e3 ♔f5 44 ♔f3 g4+ 45 ♔e3 ♔e5 46 a3 f5 47 a4 a5 and White perishes due to zugzwang.

38...♞e8 39 a4

There are no saves: if 39 ♞h6 g3 40 ♞f7+ ♔g7 41 ♞d6+ (or 41 ♞xg5+ ♔g6 42 ♞f3 ♞e2+ 43 ♞d1 ♞f2 and wins) 41...♔g6 42 ♞xe8 g2 and the passed pawn goes through.

39...♞e5 40 ♞g3 ♞e2 41 ♞h5

Alekhine Alert!

The rook ending is not drawn after 41 ♖xe2 ♜xe2+ 42 ♔c3 g3 43 ♜d7 f5 44 a5 g2 45 ♜d1 f4 46 a6 ♜e6.

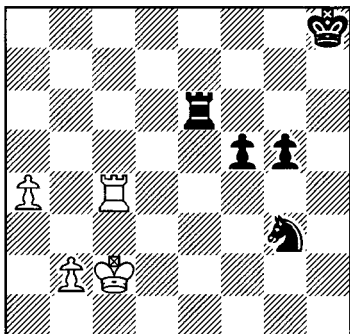
41...♜e6 42 ♜c7

Black wins easily after 42 ♔d2 g3 43 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 44 ♔xe2 g2.

42...g3

Winning a piece.

43 ♖xg3 ♖xg3 44 ♜xc4 f5



I can slow up White's pawns with my rook, while the knight escorts my own pawns to victory.

45 a5 f4 46 ♔d3 f3 47 ♜c2 ♖f5 48 b4

Black wins in all lines: the most entertaining is 48 a6 ♜xa6 49 ♔e4 ♜f6 50 ♔e5 ♖e3! (a typical counter-attacking blow with the Alekhine knight) 51 ♜c1 ♖g4+ 52 ♔e4 f2 53 ♜f1 ♖h2.

48...♖d6 49 ♜f2 g4 50 ♔d4 ♜e2 51 ♜f1 ♖f5+ 52 ♔c5 g3! 53 a6

Or 53 ♜xf3 g2 and the black knight holds g3, ensuring promotion.

53...g2 54 ♜a1 f2 55 a7 ♜e8 0-1

The black rook gives itself up for the cause, leaving the knight and pawns triumphant.

Objectively we must note that

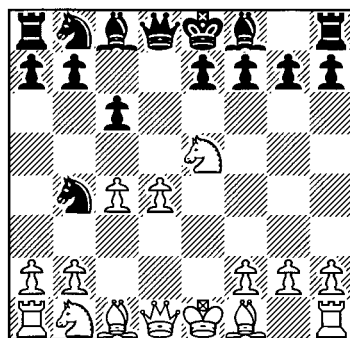
White won the opening struggle, in that both 9 ♖e2 and 15 ♖f3 would have given him some grinding advantage, while 20 ♜e3 would have given him a dangerous attack. For this reason I recommend the move I did not play, 6...♖b4, which is seen in the next game. There Black avoids potential distress, not to mention the dreaded plus equals!

Game 32 P.Blatny-A.Baburin Las Vegas 2003

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5 ♖xe5 c6 6 c4

As in the previous game, where I played the quiet 6...♖c7 and White got the initiative. However, Black has a stronger move!

6...♖b4!



This is possible, unlike in the Kengis Variation, as White does not have ♜a4 with check.

7 ♖e3

The trap 7 a3? ♖xd4! has claimed many victims: White loses material in all lines. Since both 8 axb4 ♕e5+ and 8 ♖xd4 ♖c2+ leave White a pawn down for nothing, the only chance to complicate is 8 ♖xf7, but then 8...♕e4+ should win for Black as the following variations show:

a) 9 ♕e2 ♖d3+ 10 ♖d1 (worse is 10 ♖d2 ♕xe2+ 11 ♖xe2 ♖xc1 12 ♖xh8 ♖b3+ and Black is a piece up) 10...♕xe2+ 11 ♖xe2 ♖xc1 12 ♖xh8 ♖xe2 13 ♖xe2 g6 14 ♖c3 ♖g7 15 ♖xg6 hxg6 and Black's two bishops should beat White's rook and pawn.

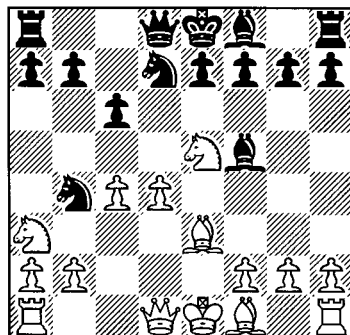
b) 9 ♖e2 ♕xg2 10 ♖f3 ♖c2+! 11 ♖e2 (worse is 11 ♖d2 ♕xf2+ 12 ♕e2 ♕xe2+ 13 ♖xe2 ♖xa1 14 ♖xh8 ♖b3+ 15 ♖c2 ♖xc1 16 ♖xc1 g6 17 ♖d3 ♖g7 18 ♖xg6 hxg6 19 ♖xg6+ ♖f8 with an easy piece up win, or 11 ♕xc2 ♕xf3 12 ♖xh8 ♕xh1+ 13 ♖e2 ♖a6 14 ♕xh7 ♖g4+ 15 ♖d2 0-0-0+ with a decisive attack) 11...♖g4 12 ♖xg4 ♕xg4+ 13 ♖d2 ♕xd1+ 14 ♖xd1 ♖xa1 15 ♖xh8 g6 16 ♖g1 ♖b3 17 ♖e3 ♖g7 18 ♖xg6 hxg6 19 ♖xg6 ♖f7 (through the settling dust we see that Black is just a piece up for one pawn) 20 ♖g4 ♖d7 21 ♖c2 ♖bc5 22 ♖d2 ♖h8 23 ♖f3 ♖e6 24 b4 b6 25 h4 ♖f6 0-1 N.Khaliavsky-A.Leontiev, Tula 2000.

7...♖f5

Black's main point: the threat to c2 seems to force 8 ♖a3 – a constantly repeating Alekhine theme which we have seen before, as in Tal's great victory in Game 7. With the knight on a3 White's whole position is lamed, as he can't kick

out the black knight and his queen's rook is tied to the defence of a2.

Some practical examples show White's difficulties after 8 ♖a3 ♖d7:



a) 9 ♖d7 ♕xd7 10 ♖e2 e6 11 ♕b3 (instead of this, perhaps 11 0-0 ♖e7 12 ♖g4 ♖g6 13 ♖h5 would give White chances to draw) 11...♖e7 12 ♖d1 h5 13 0-0 ♖g4 14 ♖fe1 a5 15 d5 ♖xe2 16 ♖xe2 cxd5 17 cxd5 ♖xd5 18 ♖c5 ♖xc5 19 ♖xd5 ♕c6 20 ♖b5 a4 21 ♕c2 ♖b6 22 ♕e4 ♖d8 23 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 24 ♕xc6+ bxc6 25 ♖c3 a3 26 bxa3 (Black gives his pawn back to secure the better ending and wins with his superior structure and minor piece) 26...♖d7 27 ♖f1 ♖e7 28 a4 ♖b4 29 ♖e4 ♖a8 30 ♖g5 ♖e7 31 ♖e4 c5 32 ♖h4 ♖xa4 33 ♖xh5 ♖xa2 34 ♖e4 f5 35 ♖g3 c4 36 ♖h4 c3 37 ♖xb4 c2 38 ♖c4 ♖a1+ 39 ♖e2 c1♖ 40 ♖xc1 ♖xc1 0-1 M.Moraru-M.Grunberg, Rumanian Ch., Satu Mare 2003.

b) 9 ♖f3 e5 10 ♖e2 (if 10 dxe5 ♕a5 11 ♖d2 ♖xe5 12 ♕e2 ♖bd3+ 13 ♖d1 ♖xb2+ 14 ♖e1 ♖bd3+ 15 ♖d1 ♕xa3 wins, or 11 ♕d2 0-0-0 with a massive attack) 10...e4 11 ♖d2 ♖d3+ 12 ♖xd3

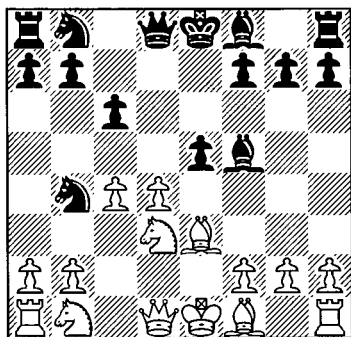
Alekhine Alert!

exd3 13 ♖b3 ♖b6 14 0-0 ♖xb3 15 axb3 ♙b4 16 ♘ab1 and White somehow drew this terrible position in G.Kamsky-S.Mamedyarov, Internet match 2006.

8 ♘d3

A strong player can see the difficulties he will face after 8 ♘a3, and so will search for something else – but what he finds might be even worse!

8...e5!



Black defends the b4-knight with gain of time. Baburin had this position three times in two years – against a GM (this game) a master and an IM – and won all three!

9 ♘xb4 ♙xb4+ 10 ♘c3 ♖a5

Black is already better. White can't even play the natural 11 ♖c1 because of 11...♖a2, while Fritz is so desperate it recommends the pawn sacrifice of 11 ♙e2!?, after which I seriously doubt White has compensation for the pawn.

11 ♖b3 0-0

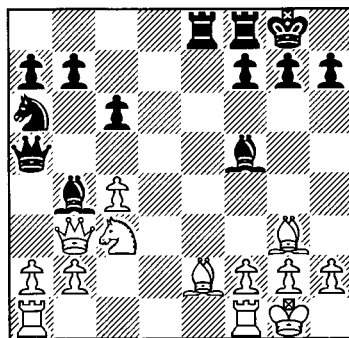
Baburin won even more quickly in a later game with the equally good 11...exd4 12 ♙xd4 0-0 13 0-0-0 ♘a6 14 ♙d3 ♖fd8 15 ♙xf5 ♖xf5 16 ♖c2 ♖f4+

17 ♖d2?? (17 ♙e3, losing the c4-pawn, is necessary as now a piece goes) 17...♖xd4! 0-1 T.Gillani-A.Baburin, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

12 ♙e2 exd4 13 ♙xd4 ♘a6 14 0-0 ♙c5 15 ♙e5

After 15 ♙xc5 ♘xc5 16 ♖a3 ♖xa3 17 bxa3 ♖fd8 Black had a much better game in view of White's shattered pawns, and duly won in S.Collins-A.Baburin, Bunratty 2004.

15...♖ae8 16 ♙g3 ♙b4



It's all White can do just to avoid losing material – this is the kind of Alekhine we love to see!

17 ♖d1 ♖d8 18 ♖c1 ♖fe8

Black has manoeuvred into an ideal development and White is hard pressed to hold.

19 ♖e1 ♘c5 20 ♙h4

20 a3 ♙xc3 21 ♖xc3 ♖xc3 22 bxc3 ♘e4 23 ♖ac1 ♘xc3 24 ♖xc3 ♖xe2! is another winning line given by Baburin.

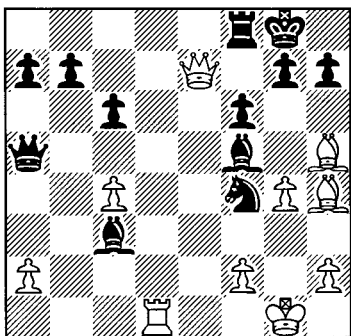
20...f6 21 ♙h5 ♖xe1+ 22 ♖xe1 ♘d3 23 ♖e2 ♘xb2!

Decisive.

24 ♖e1 ♘d3 25 ♖d1

Black needn't fear 25 ♖e8+ ♜xe8 26 ♜xe8+ ♙f8.

25...♙xc3 26 ♖e7 ♜f8 27 g4 ♘f4!



28 ♙f7+

Since 28 gxf5 ♘xh5 wins easily for Black, White tries “winning” the queen.

28...♜xf7! 29 ♜d8+ ♖xd8 30 ♖xd8+ ♜f8 31 ♖c7 ♙e5 32 ♖xb7?

Now the game ends abruptly, but the result would not change after the slightly better 32 ♖e7 ♙xg4, when Black has an overwhelming material and positional advantage.

32...♜b8 0-1

It's either mate or Black wins the queen.

6 c4 can be considered refuted, as after 6...♘b4! White is already struggling for equality.

♘xe5 c6 6 ♘d2

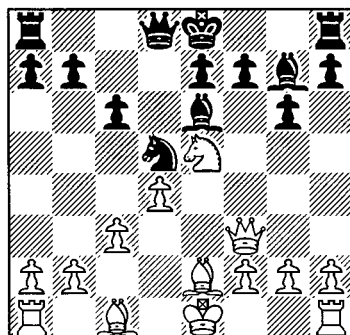
We saw this idea of supporting the advanced knight in the Kengis (Game 24), where the great Larsen freed his position after 5...g6 6 ♘d2 ♙g7 7 ♘df3 0-0 8 ♙c4 c6 9 0-0 ♘d7 10 ♜e1 ♘xe5 11 ♘xe5 a5 12 a4 ♙e6 13 ♖f3 ♖d6 14 c3 c5 and eventually obtained the better game.

Because exchanges essentially favour Black (since about all White has here is a slight space advantage), this idea of encouraging Black to exchange a piece is a non starter. As we will see, Black could equalize with ease, but he lacks Larsen's boldness.

6...♘d7 7 ♘df3 ♘xe5 8 ♘xe5 g6

Carlsen to Kengis once again!

9 ♖f3 ♙e6 10 c3 ♙g7 11 ♙e2



In my opinion Black loses this game because he never gets in either of the key Kengis diagonal softening breaks, ...e5 or ...c5. We recall that Larsen broke this way at his first opportunity. In fact Black could consistently play for a central break right now: 11...♖c7 12 ♘d3 ♙f5 13 0-0 0-0 14 ♜e1 ♜fe8 (White

Game 33

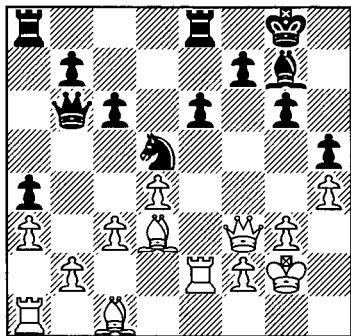
S.Tiviakov-M.Van der Werf
Dutch Championship,
Leeuwarden 2001

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5

can't do a thing about the coming break) 15 ♖d2 ♖ad8 16 h3 ♖xd3 17 ♖xd3 e5 and with the Kengis break in, Black stands fully equal. This position is more favourable to Black than the analogous position in Anand-Adams (Game 26, note to Black's 12th move) as his rooks are much better placed here on the centre files, and the white bishop is less dangerous on d3 than on the long diagonal.

Fritz evaluates the end of the above variation (after 17...e5) as double zero, or dead even, and I agree. Black has solved all his problems, but it is the nature of the position that, against solid White play, the game levels out and a draw is likely.

11...a5?! 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♘d3 a4 14 a3 ♖f5 15 ♖e1 ♖xd3 16 ♖xd3 e6 17 g3 ♜b6 18 h4 h5 19 ♙g2 ♖fe8 20 ♖e2

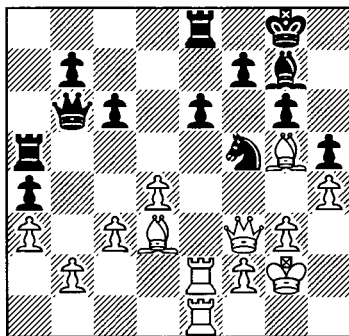


20...♘e7?

Inexplicable! Here Black could break with 20...e5 or 20...c5 and finally liven up his Kengis bishop – and create reasonable counterplay – but instead he resorts to passive defence and allows

White time to set up an attack.

21 ♖g5 ♗f5 22 ♖ae1 ♖a5



23 g4!

Since Black will not act, White will! White begins an attack.

23...hxcg4 24 ♜xcg4 ♜c7 25 ♖g1 ♜d7 26 ♖c2 ♖ea8 27 ♗f1

The g-file is dangerous for Black.

27...c5

Better late than never, but this is awfully late!

28 dxc5 ♜xc5 29 h5 gxh5 30 ♜f3!

White likes the open g-file but has no interest in falling into the discovery on the queen trap: 30 ♜hx5 f6 31 ♖xf6 ♗e3+! 32 ♖xe3 ♖xh5 33 ♖xg7+ ♜xg7 34 ♖xg7 ♗xg7 35 ♖xe6 ♖b5 and Black has the better endgame.

30...♗f8 31 ♖d2 ♖d5 32 ♖e1 ♖c8 33 ♜g2 ♖f6?

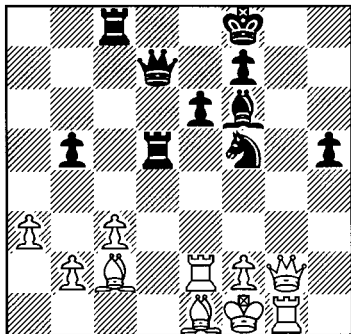
Overlooking a tactic. Black had to play 33...f6, which keeps the g-file semi-closed and prevents the following blow – though White would still be slightly better after 34 ♜e4.

34 ♖xa4!

White wins his pawn back and takes

over the advantage, as the bishop is immune: 34...♖xa4 35 ♖g8+ ♔e7 36 ♖xc8.

34...b5 35 ♖c2



White has targets on both sides of the board. It may be only plus equals on the computer, but the human defensive task is too much. Black should have counter-attacked much earlier in the centre!

35...♖c4 36 ♖f3

Not the impatient 36 ♖g8+ ♔e7 37 ♖b3 as 37...♖c8 saves the day.

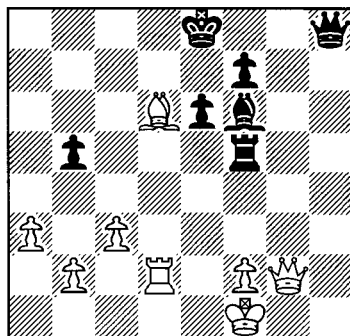
36...♖g4?

Black panics and gives up a pawn; it's true that after 36...h4 37 b3 ♖c8 38 ♖g4 White is better with his two bishops and queenside pawn majority, but this is nowhere near as bad as the game.

37 ♖xg4 hxg4 38 ♖xg4

White is a pawn up with his positional advantage intact. Tiviakov now wins smoothly.

38...♖c7 39 ♖e4 ♖c5 40 ♖d2 ♖h2 41 ♖f4 ♖h8 42 ♖d2 ♖e7 43 ♖xf5 ♖xf5 44 ♖d6+ ♖e8 45 ♖g2



The threat of ♖a8 ends resistance – Black could resign here.

45...♖d5 46 ♖xd5 exd5 47 ♖xd5 ♖h3+ 48 ♖e1 ♖e6+ 49 ♖xe6+ fxe6 50 ♖e2 ♖d7 51 ♖f8 ♖c6 52 ♖d3 1-0

This game shows the harmlessness of White's opening – and then demonstrates the perils of passive play. Had Black broken in the centre like Larsen he would have been fine.

Game 34 Sti.Andersen-M.Gajic Borup 2009

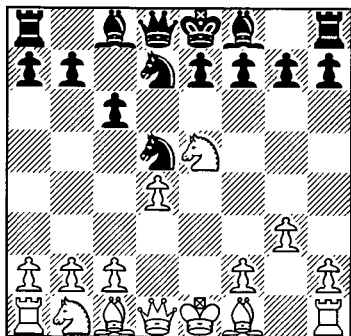
1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5 ♖xe5 c6 6 g3 ♖d7

This recent game makes a nice contrast to the previous one. Black plays sharply and aggressively from the start, makes his break, and gets a good game.

Note that the Carlsen move order allows this quick attack on White's central knight. When Black played a Kengis order in Game 26, 5...g6 6 g3 ♖g7 7 ♖g2 0-0, he had to prepare for a few

Alekhine Alert!

moves (because of his loose knight on d5) before he could deal with White's advanced cavalry.



7 ♖f3 g6

Now Black switches to a comfortable Kengis.

8 ♖g2 ♖g7 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♖e1 b5!?

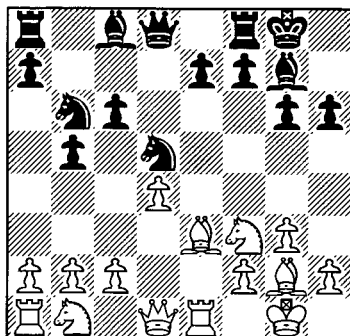
A sharp and interesting idea: Black intends to secure his knight in the centre, and follow up with queenside play. He is not afraid of the fianchettoed white bishop, as he will remove his pieces from the long diagonal.

Of course it's also possible to play simply: 10...♖e8 11 c4 ♖c7 12 ♖c3 e5 with near equality.

11 ♖g5?!

Since Black has forced the pace, it's now or never: if White wants anything out of the opening he has to play 11 a4 here and challenge Black's plan. After the likely 11...♖7b6 12 axb5 cxb5 a very double-edged position has arisen: White has weakened the defences of Black's centralized knight, but Black's position is still intact and he has the c-file for counterplay.

11...h6 12 ♖e3 ♖7b6



Black has consolidated and stands at least equal. Note that the black knight on b6 is fine here, as White does not have kingside attacking chances in this line, with his light-squared bishop pointing the other direction.

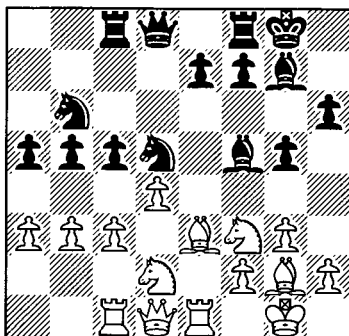
13 ♖bd2 ♖f5 14 ♖h4 ♖e6 15 c3 a5 16 ♖c1 ♖c8

Black clears his pieces off the long diagonal, sort of like a reversed Voronezh! (see Game 38).

17 a3 g5

Black drives back the white knight and...

18 ♖hf3 ♖f5 19 b3 c5!



...breaks on the queenside! This is how I like to see the Alekhine played!

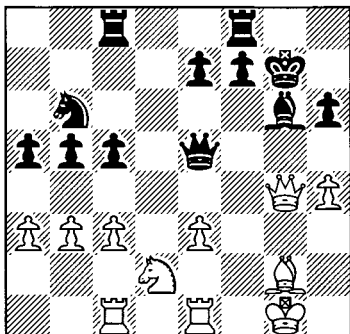
20 ♖e5?

White errs under pressure. Correct is 20 dxc5 ♖xe3 21 fxe3 ♜xc5 22 ♖d4 and White's strong knight compensates for his pawn weaknesses.

20...♖xe3 21 fxe3 ♜xe5 22 dxe5 ♜c7 23 ♜h5 ♜g7 24 h4 ♜g6 25 ♜g4 gxh4!

Another bold move: Black doesn't fear the opening of the g-file, as he sees he can use it for attack.

26 gxh4 ♜xe5



Black's excellent opening and mid-game play has left him a good pawn up. It would be nice to say that "Black converts smoothly", but it doesn't work out quite that easily!

27 ♖f3 ♜h5 28 ♜g3 ♜h8 29 ♜h2 ♜g8 30 ♜h3 ♜e4 31 ♜e5+ ♜xe5+ 32 ♖xe5 ♜cf8 33 ♜f1 f6 34 ♖g4 ♜h7 35 ♜f4 f5 36 ♖e5 e6 37 b4 ♜fd8 38 ♜f2 axb4 39 axb4 c4 40 ♜a1 ♜a8

40...♖a4 is a simple, clear win, but this is the 40th move.

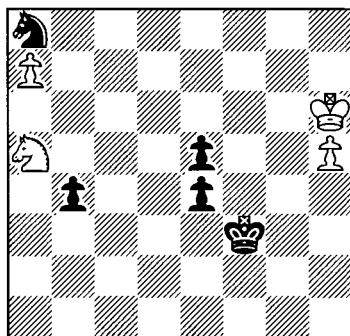
41 ♜fa2 ♜xa2+ 42 ♜xa2 ♜a8 43 ♜a5 ♜xa5 44 bxa5 ♖a4?!

Missing a second, more difficult win: 44...b4! 45 cxb4 c3 46 axb6 c2 47 b7 (after 47 ♖d3 ♜xd3 48 b7 c1 ♜ 49 b8 ♜ ♜xe3 Black should win eventually) 47...c1 ♜ 48 b8 ♜ ♜h1+ 49 ♜g3 ♜g1+ 50 ♜f4 ♜h2 mate.

45 a6 ♖xc3 46 ♜g2 ♖d5 47 a7 ♖c7 48 ♜xe4 fxe4 49 ♖c6 ♜g6 50 ♜g3 b4

Even after the best 50...c3 51 ♖d4 e5 52 ♖xb5 c2 53 ♖xc7 c1 ♜ 54 a8 ♜ ♜xe3+ 55 ♜g2 ♜d2+ 56 ♜f1 ♜c1+ 57 ♜e2 ♜xc7 58 ♜xe4+ I'm not sure Black is winning any more!

51 ♖e5+ ♜f5 52 ♖xc4 ♖a8 53 ♖d6+ ♜e5 54 ♖c4+ ♜d5 55 ♖a5 e5 56 ♜g4 ♜c5 57 ♜h5 ♜b5 58 ♖b3 ♜c4 59 ♖a5+ ♜d3 60 ♜xh6 ♜xe3 61 h5 ♜f3



62 ♖c4?

White blunders, just when the draw is in reach: 62 ♜g5! e3 63 h6 e2 64 h7 e1 ♜ 65 h8 ♜ ♜g1+ 66 ♜f5 ♜xa7 67 ♜h3+ ♜e2 68 ♜g4+ and White will give perpetual check or take both of Black's extra pawns.

62...e3 63 ♖xe3 ♜xe3 64 ♜g7 b3 65 h6 b2 66 h7 b1 ♜ 67 h8 ♜ ♜b7+ 68 ♜f6 ♜c6+ 69 ♜f5 e4 70 ♜h3+ ♜d4 71 ♜h8+

♔d3 72 ♖d8+ ♕e2 73 ♖d4 e3 0-1

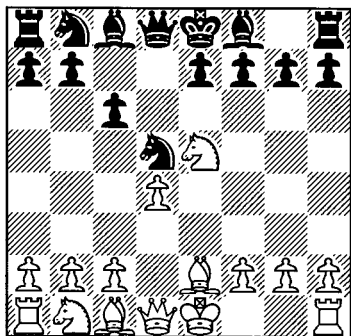
A great opening – a very messy endgame! From the repertoire point of view, one sees that Black secured his centre and quickly made the Kengis break with ...c6-c5, after which he had no problems – except for the eternal one of how to win the won game!

Anand himself likes 6 ♖e2 against the Carlsen (as we will see in Game 36), only using 6 g3 against the Kengis – and this game shows us why. Black's counterplay comes faster here as his knight is secure in the centre – and White is very hard pressed to demonstrate any opening advantage at all.

Game 35

K.Niemi-M.Maki Uuro
Finnish Championship,
Helsinki 2006

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♗f3 dxe5 5
♗xe5 c6 6 ♖e2



Preferred by Kasparov and Anand – all one can say is this is White's best

chance for advantage. The ideas should be familiar by now: White keeps the bishop back so he can play c2-c4 at the right time (but not now, because of Baburin's 6...♗b4!). Attacking the well-defended knight on d5 is ineffective, so neither ♖c4 nor g2-g3/♖g2 promises anything. However, the bishop might go to f3 later if the long diagonal is weakened.

6 ♖e2 is the realistic move: since all attempts to destroy Black fail, White simply develops and tries to keep a slight edge.

6...♖f5

The modern move, characteristic of the Carlsen Variation, though it's also possible to play Miles' older 6...♗d7. Very high-rated White players didn't get much in the following three games: 7 ♗f3 g6 8 c4 ♗c7 9 ♗c3 ♖g7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♖g5 (or 11 ♖e1 c5 12 dxc5 ♗xc5 13 ♖g5 ♖xd1 14 ♗xd1 ♖e8 and Black made a draw in L.Aronian-T.Nalbandian, Yerevan 2000) 11...♗e6 12 ♖e3 ♗f6 13 h3 b6 (Miles himself preferred 13...♖c7 against P.Zarnicki, Oviedo rapid 1993, and also drew) 14 ♖b3 ♖c7 15 ♖fe1 ♖b7 and Black was cramped but solid in C.Bauer-S.Mamedyarov, Spanish Team Ch. 2005, which was in fact finally won by Black – in 98 moves!

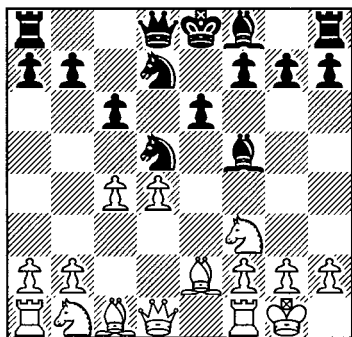
7 0-0

For the wild 7 g4 see the next game.

7...♗d7 8 ♗f3

For the exchanging 8 ♖g4 see Game 37.

8...e6 9 c4!



Well timed: I think this move represents best play for White in this variation.

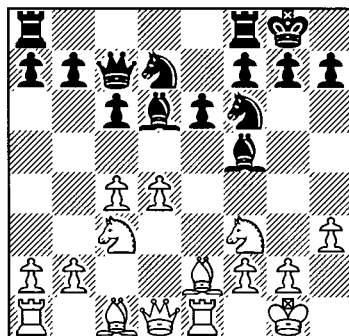
Now 9...b4 is nowhere near as strong as the 6 c4 b4 counter of Game 32, which Baburin won stylishly – three times! He tried the same knight move one more time at this juncture, but was fortunate to draw: 10 c3 c2 11 b1 b4 12 a1 c2 13 b1 b4 ½-½ S.Collins-A.Baburin, Nagoya Open 2009, looks like a typical grandmaster draw, but wait! As Baburin himself pointed out after the game, White doesn't have to allow the repetition, but can sacrifice the exchange with 12 g5! (instead of the drawing 12 a1) 12...f6 13 e3 x b1 14 x b1, which gives him a tremendous attack, as the black knight will be driven back to a6, the diagonal b1-h7 is a strong attacking avenue (weakened by Black's forced ...f7-f6) and, furthermore, White has a good central break with d4-d5 coming after he kicks the knight. I would prefer to be White.

9...f5f6

Best.

10 c3 c7 11 e1 d6 12 h3 0-0

12...0-0 is very dangerous, as due to the cluttered d-file, White can get his next move in with tempo and attack. A sample follow-up is: 13 c5! f4 (or 13...e7 14 b4 with a similar attack) 14 a4 x c1 15 a x c1 b8 16 b4 a6 17 d1 e4 18 d3 x c3 19 x c3 x d3 20 x d3 f6 21 a4 d5 22 b3 f4 23 d2 g5 24 b5 and White breaks through decisively.



13 e3

13 h4 is my recommendation, and would probably be Anand's choice if he got this position. White captures the light-squared bishop for a knight, and then even if Black exchanges a pair of bishops, White will be left with the slightly superior minor piece: the long-range bishop vs. a knight in a semi open position – and the "traditional" tiny pull.

So one might say, why play Alekhine's Defence if this is the best you can do? Well, first of all, it's not

Alekhine Alert!

that bad: I've let *Fritz* run for all the time I've been writing this note, and all it gives is that White has slightly the better of "=", that is, about 0.25 plus for White, or a quarter of a pawn. So if White knows his stuff, and plays in Anand/Kasparov style, he can get a quarter of a point advantage? Can't even make it to plus equals? That's not too tragic a road, nor is it that different from defending a more popular opening such as a main line Ruy.

But yes, one must say that the resulting position is on the cheerless side, and Black can only play to equalize gradually and draw. If everyone played like Anand, then perhaps I could not recommend the Alekhine – but since the great majority of non-GM opponents play "junk", then I think a little suffering for a draw in the main lines is acceptable.

After 13 ... Qh4 I recommend 13... Qh2 + 14 Qh1 Qf4 15 Qxf5 exf5 16 Qd3 g6 and White has only the minimal edge of the Tartakower Caro-Kann, and in this position that amounts to just about nothing.

To be absolutely clear, by "just about nothing" I mean by careful play Black can make a draw. You do need to be careful; you probably can't play for a win.

I'm sure those weren't the words you wanted to hear, but that's modern chess!

13...h6

Now Black keeps his bishop, and de-

spite the computer's assertion of plus equals, I can hardly see anything for White.

14 Qd2 Qfe8

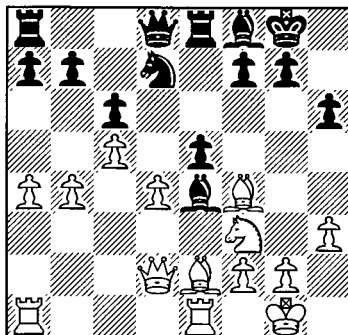
Black has a Caro-Kann restraint position, with kings on the same side. In other words, Black has nominally less space, but White's only break, d4-d5 , just opens lines for Black. White has only a formal advantage.

15 c5?!

If Black were castled queenside, as we saw above, this would be a strong move – here it just gives up the key central square d5 .

Fritz likes 15 Qad1 and claims White is still slightly better, but I see no play for White. I think that after the simple 15... Qad8 the position is objectively equal.

15... Qf8 16 Qf4 Qd8 17 b4 Qe4 18 Qxe4 Qxe4 19 a4 e5



Black breaks in the centre and stands fully equal.

20 Qe3

Simplest is 20 Qxe5 Qxe5 21 dxe5 Qxd2 22 Qxd2 Qxe5 with a dead draw.

Slightly less dead is 20 dxe5 ♖xf3 21 ♖xf3 ♜xe5 22 ♖e4 ♜xd2 23 ♖xd2 a5 with a little play for both sides, but still pretty drawish.

20...exd4 21 ♖xd4 ♖d5 22 ♖a3

22 ♖d3 is better, immediately challenging the open file with equality.

22...a5!

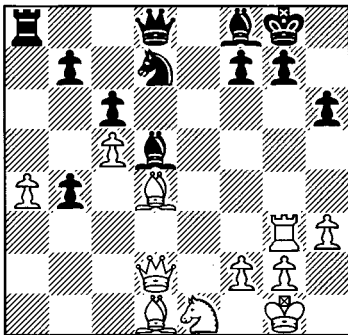
Now the Alekhine counter-attack finally kicks in! White's queenside structure is weak; he should have run to the draw.

23 ♖d1

If 23 b5 ♜xc5 snaps off a pawn.

23...♜xe1+ 24 ♜xe1 axb4 25 ♖g3

White can't hold material; e.g. 25 ♜xb4 b6 26 ♜d3 bxc5 27 ♜xc5 ♜b8 28 ♜c3 ♜xc5 29 ♖xc5 ♜b1 and a piece has to go, as White can't defend everything.



25...♖h7?!

Black has won a good pawn, but this move allows White attacking compensation, based on the momentarily exposed black king. Correct is 25...g6 (necessary sooner or later, and better sooner, without wasting a tempo mov-

ing the king) and if 26 ♖c2 ♜xc5, when White has no compensation for two pawns and the attack falls short: 27 ♖xg6 fxg6 28 ♖xc5 (or 28 ♜xg6+ ♖h7 29 ♖g4 ♜e7 30 ♜c2+ ♜e4 31 f3 h5 32 ♜xe4 ♖xe4 33 fxe4 c5 34 ♖b2 c4 35 e5+ ♖g7 36 ♜xc4 ♜c5+ and wins) 28...♖xc5 29 ♜xh6 ♖xf2+ 30 ♖xf2 ♜f6+ 31 ♜f3 ♖f7 and now that the attack is over, Black should win with his strong, extra passed pawn.

26 ♜d3?!

White should seize the opportunity to recapture his pawn with 26 ♜xb4 g6 (if 26...b6 27 ♜b1+! spotlights Black's bad king) 27 ♖c2 ♖g8 (the loss of two tempi can't go unpunished, but 27...b6 28 ♜b1 is still a strong attack) 28 ♖xg6! fxg6 29 ♜b1 ♜e8 30 ♜xg6+ ♖f7 31 ♜f5+ ♖e7 32 ♜d6 and White's attack is very dangerous.

26...♖e4

Both sides play inaccurately. Black should assert his passed pawn and deny White the a1-h7 diagonal, the firing line toward his king: 26...b3 is better for Black.

27 ♜f4

27 ♖c2! is obviously correct, when Black's defence is not easy; e.g. 27...♖g6 28 ♜f4 ♖xc2 29 ♜xc2+ ♖g8 30 ♖xg7! ♖xg7 31 ♜h5 and White is better.

27...♜xc5 28 f3

Now Black keeps his material and defends; and 28 ♖c2 is too late in view of 28...♜d6.

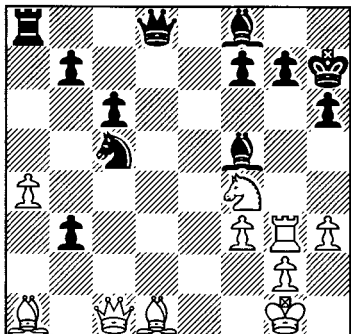
28...♖d3!

Decisive – finally!

29 ♖a1

Or 29 ♜xg7+ ♕xg7 30 ♖xc5 ♕g6 and wins.

29...♕f5 30 ♜c1 b3!



At last! The crucial diagonal is denied to the white bishop.

31 ♖h2 ♜xa4 32 ♖h5 ♕g6 33 ♖f4 ♕d6 34 ♖xg6 ♕xg3+ 35 ♖xg3 fxg6 36 ♜c3 ♜d6+ 37 ♖f2 ♜xa1 0-1

This is the simplest: White has no more counterplay and resigns here, rather than waiting for the denouement with 38 ♜xa1 b2! 39 ♜b1 ♜d2+ 40 ♕e2 ♜c1 and the pawn goes through.

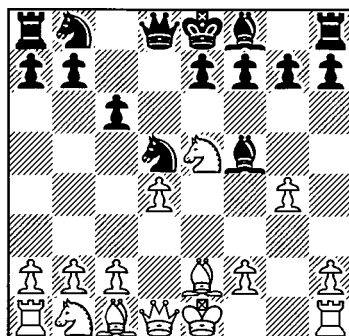
This is a classic modern Alekhine's Defence: Black reaches near or practical equality out of the opening. The position arrived at might be hard to defend against Anand but should be good enough for anyone else. Proof of that is in the game itself: just when a draw was expected, White played inaccurately and Black struck hard with a counter-attack. As long as chess is played by human beings all results are possible!

Game 36

V.Anand-M.Carlsen

**World Blitz Championship,
Moscow 2007**

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖f3 dxe5 5 ♗xe5 c6 6 ♕e2 ♕f5 7 g4



Nigel Short was willing to face this against two superb attacking players, Kasparov and Judit Polgar, and one can see why from the games: in each he equalized rather easily; in fact he nearly defeated Kasparov. And so Carlsen is also not afraid against the current World Champion. In general, I think that such violent anti-Alekhine variations play into the strength of the defence as a counter-attacking system. The hardest lines to meet are the quiet ones aiming for positional pressure, such as the previous game where White could have maintained an edge out of the opening (13 ♖h4), albeit a very small one. Normally the quiet squeeze is Anand's style, but he goes for broke here in a blitz game – and almost loses!

7...♙e6 8 c4

White can also attack with the other bishop pawn: 8 f4 f6 9 ♖d3 ♙f7 10 0-0 ♗a6 11 ♘c3 ♗xc3 12 bxc3 g6 13 ♖e1 ♙g7 14 f5 ♖d7 15 ♖f2 gxf5 16 ♖xf5 (Black gets the queens off, as 16 gxf5 ♙g8 17 ♙h1 ♙d5+ 18 ♙f3 ♖xf5 wins a pawn) 16...♖xf5 17 gxf5 ♙g8 18 ♙f2 0-0-0 19 ♙e3 ♙f8 20 ♙f3 ♗c7 21 a4 ♗d5 ½-½ J.Polgar-N.Short, Bled Olympiad 2002. That was a short-lived attack!

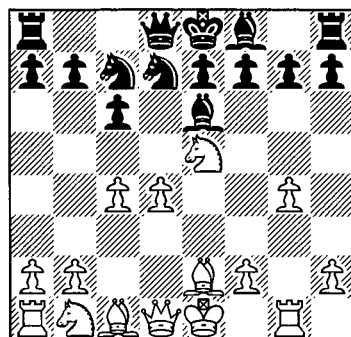
8...♗c7

Short played 8...♗b6 9 b3 (maybe 9 c5!? ♗d5 10 ♗c3 is better) 9...f6 10 ♗d3 ♖xd4 11 ♙b2 ♖d8 12 ♗c3 (Kasparov sacrifices a pawn, but has no real targets and so his development advantage gradually comes to nothing) 12...♗a6 13 ♖d2 ♖c7 14 0-0-0 0-0-0 15 ♖e3 ♙f7 16 f4 ♙b8 17 h4 e6 18 ♗e4 ♗d7 19 h5 h6 20 g5 ♙e7 21 g6 ♙e8 22 ♙b1 ♖b6 23 ♙d4 c5 24 ♙b2 ♙a8 25 ♗g3 ♗db8 26 ♖he1 ♙d7 27 ♗f5 exf5 28 ♖xe7 ♖hg8 29 ♙f3 ♙c6 30 ♙xc6 ♖xc6 31 ♖e6 ♖xe6 32 ♖xe6 ♗c6 33 ♗f2 ♗c7 34 ♖ee1 ♙b8 35 ♙c3 ♙c8 36 ♙c2 ♖ge8 37 ♖xd8+ ♙xd8 38 ♖xe8+ ♗xe8 39 ♗d1 ♙d7 40 ♗e3 ♙e6 41 ♙d3 ♗d6 42 ♗d5 ♗e4 43 ♗c7+ ♙d7 44 ♗d5 ♗e7 (Short's excellent defence could have been rewarded here: 44...♗g3 45 ♙xf6 ♗xh5 should win for Black) 45 ♗xe7 ♙xe7 46 ♙e1 ♙d7 47 a4 b6 48 ♙e3 ♙c6 49 ♙d3 a6 50 ♙e3 b5 51 ♙d3 bxa4 52 bxa4 ♙b6 53 ♙c2 ♗d6 54 ♙d3 ♗c8 55 ♙c3 ♗e7 56 ♙e3 ½-½ G.Kasparov-N.Short, Russia vs. World rapid match, Moscow

2002.

Rather than go into a possibly prepared line from Kasparov-Short, Carlsen puts the knight on another square, from where (as in my win over Furdzik, Game 31) it can support the counter-stroke ...b7-b5, even as a pawn sacrifice.

9 ♖g1 ♗d7



The typical knight challenge and tempo gain works especially well here, as White has wasted a development tempo on 7 g4.

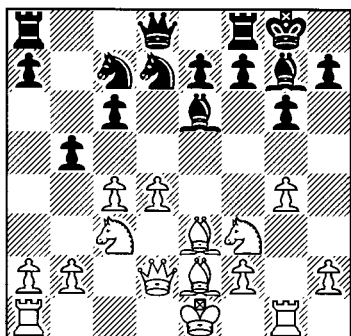
10 ♗f3 g6 11 ♗c3 ♙g7

Black has an excellent Kengis, where White's ♖g1/g2-g4 set-up can hardly be recommended (to attack the king the rook should be on h1 to back up h4-h5), and White has no safe place for his king. I think Black is already better: Carlsen has prospects on the long diagonal and has by far the safer king. Once again a “wipe the Alekhine off the board” falls short.

My conclusion after researching this book is that only the positional pressure lines are truly worrisome for

Alekhine's Defence players.

12 ♖e3 0-0 13 ♜d2 b5!



As in Game 31, this is the typical counter when Black has his knight on c7 – Carlsen breaks up White's queen's wing, demonstrating that the white king has no safety there.

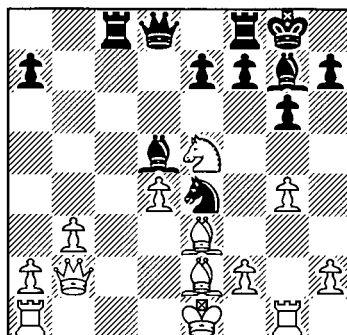
Anand, having nothing going for his game positionally, snatches the offered pawn and hangs on! **14 cxb5**

For the record, if White declines, Black gets the better game as follows: 14 b3 bxc4 15 bxc4 ♖b6 and White can't maintain his position; or 14 d5 cxd5 15 cxb5 (if 15 cxd5, 15...♙xc3 16 ♜xc3 ♜xd5 wins a pawn) 15...♜f6 and Black has cleared the long diagonal with advantage.

14...cxb5 15 ♜xb5 ♜xb5 16 ♙xb5 ♙d5 17 ♙e2 ♜c8 18 b3 ♜f6 19 ♜e5 ♜e4 20 ♜b2

I think Carlsen has played excellently so far and he has tremendous compensation for the pawn: White has three pawn islands, including an isolated d-pawn and deranged kingside

(that early g2-g4!), while Black's structure is excellent and invulnerable. Black has a safe king, White, to put it mildly, does not. Black's bank rank is connected, White's is not. But how to continue?



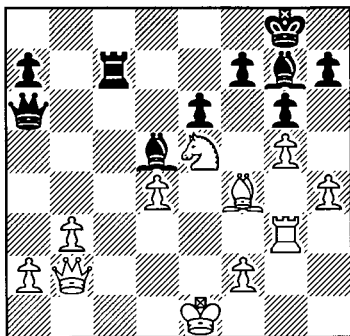
One sees that Carlsen eventually lost the game, and I think his next move is the first downward step. Although this natural move defends his queen, it's still not correct. First, Anand is able to block the queen with his next, 21 g5, and then this same pawn move prevents ...f7-f6 to kick out the white knight.

I looked at this position for a long time before finding the solution: Black should play 20...♜c3! 21 ♜c1 (the rook is too strong and must be exchanged: if 21 f3 ♜xe3 wins, or 21 ♙d3 ♜a5 22 b4 ♜c7 23 ♙xe4 ♙xe4 24 ♜c1 ♜xc1+ 25 ♜xc1 ♜b7 26 ♜d2 ♜c8 27 ♜d3 ♙xd4 28 ♙xd4 ♙xd3 recovers Black's pawn with advantage, for if 29 ♜xd3 ♜c1+) 21...♜xc1+ 22 ♙xc1 (White can't play the natural 22 ♜xc1, as after 22...♜a5+

23 ♖f1 ♜xa2 Black again gets his pawn back with advantage) 22...♜b6 23 ♙e3 ♜c8 with great play. White's remaining rook is out of the game, and the white king is caught between Scylla (the c8-rook) and Charybdis (the d5-bishop). Black has more than enough for the pawn.

However, I want to make it clear that I am not criticizing Carlsen for his inaccuracy: I took an hour to find this; Carlsen had seconds. In a blitz game mistakes must happen, and overall he played extremely well, as did Anand in defending and finally winning from a compromised position.

20...e6 21 g5 ♜d6 22 h4 ♘c3 23 ♖g3 ♘xe2 24 ♙xe2 ♜c7 25 ♜c1 ♜a6+ 26 ♙e1 ♜fc8 27 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 28 ♙f4



28...♙f8

Black can basically force a draw in various ways, such as 28...♜a5+ 29 ♙d2 ♜a6, but Carlsen wants more.

29 ♘g4

White finally gets some play on the dark squares.

29...♙b4+ 30 ♙d2 ♙d6 31 ♜c3 ♙g2 32

♘e3 ♙f3 33 ♘c4 ♙d5

33...♙g2 34 ♘e3 is another draw, but Carlsen bravely continues his quest for the win.

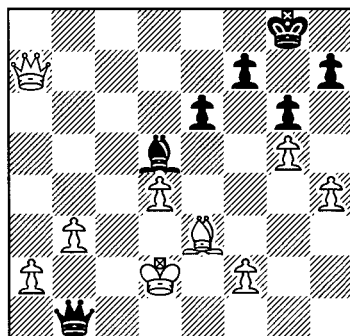
34 ♘xd6 ♜xd6 35 ♜xc7 ♜xc7 36 ♜a3 ♜h2?

It's time to wrap it up. As tough as it would have been to admit, Black has to realize that his attack has not broken through: 36...♜c2! 37 ♜xa7 ♙f3 38 ♜b8+ ♙g7 39 ♜e5+ ♙g8 is a clean draw.

37 ♙e3 ♜h1+

If 37...♜xh4 38 ♜xa7 ♜h1+ 39 ♙d2 ♜a1 40 ♙f4 and Black has a tough defence ahead of him.

38 ♙d2 ♜b1 39 ♜xa7



39...♜b2+

Or 39...♙e4 40 ♜b8+ ♙g7 41 ♜e5+ ♙g8 42 ♙c3 and the king escapes – the game is tilting in White's direction.

40 ♙d3 ♜b1+ 41 ♙c3 ♜e1+ 42 ♙b2 ♜e2+ 43 ♙a3 ♙g7 44 ♙f4 ♜b5 45 ♙e5+ ♙f8 46 ♜c5+ 1-0

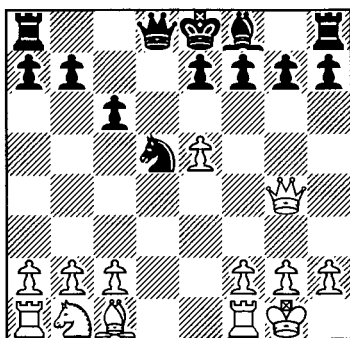
The queens come off, and Black cannot defend against three connected passed pawns.

the only free square for knight is the self-blocking e3) 11...♞xg4 12 ♞xg4 ♞f6 13 ♞h4 ♠e7 14 ♠d1 ♞a5 15 ♞g3 ♠d8 16 ♠f4 ♞f5 17 ♠c7 ♠d7 18 ♠b8 0-0 19 ♠xa7 b5! (again!) 20 ♠b6 bxc4 21 a4 ♠d6 22 ♞f3 ♞xf3 23 gxf3 ♞d5 24 ♠c5 ♠xc5 25 dxc5 ♠b7 26 ♠d2 ♠a8 27 a5 ♠ba7 28 ♠a4 ♠xa5 29 ♠xc4 ♠a1+ 30 ♠g2 ♞e7 and Black eventually won, largely due to her superior pawn structure, in N.Pogonina-Zhao Xue, Krasnoturinsk 2007.

9...e6

Once again Larsen's key observation: "the idea should be to win back the 'lost' tempo by exchange threats against the white knight."

In other words, Black threatened to take on e5; in general, exchanges are good for Black, who has slightly less space; White did not move away; thus Black should just take, when I don't see any advantage for White at all: 9...♞xe5 10 dxe5



10...e6 11 c4 ♞e7 (the knight needs to secure the kingside and attack the e-pawn) 12 ♠d1 ♞c7 13 ♠f4 (or 13 ♞c3

♞xe5 14 ♠f4 ♞f5 15 ♞g3 ♞g6 16 ♠d6 e5 17 ♠xf8 ♞xf8 and Black looks fine, though White has some compensation) 13...♞g6 14 ♞c3 (if 14 ♠g3 h5 with good counterplay) 14...♞xf4 15 ♞xf4 f5 – this idea, known from the McCutcheon Variation of the French, gains space and should equalize for Black; e.g. 16 ♠d2 ♠e7 17 ♠ad1 ♠d8 18 ♠xd8+ ♠xd8 19 ♞d4 b6 and Black is equal. White could even go wrong with 20 ♞d6?! ♞xd6 21 ♠xd6 ♠c7! 22 ♠xc6 ♠d7 and the rook is trapped.

Alternatively, 10...♞d7 is Shabalov's untried suggestion, and this looks like a clean equalizer: the ending is nothing for White with the black king able to fend for himself, Steinitz style; while Black can castle long if White stays in the middlegame, with mutual chances:

a) 11 ♞xd7+ ♞xd7 12 ♞d2 (12 f4 e6 13 c4 ♠c5+ favours Black, as White's position is nothing but holes due to the prematurely advanced pawns) 12...e6 13 ♠d1 ♞c7 14 c4 ♞b6 15 b3 ♠e7 16 ♞e4 ♠ad8 and Black gradually equalizes.

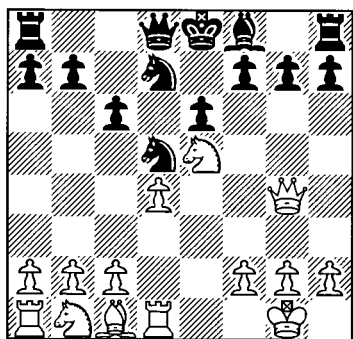
b) 11 ♞e2 0-0-0 12 c4 (12 ♠d1 ♞f4 13 ♞d2 ♞e2+ 14 ♠f1 ♞xc1 favours Black) 12...♞b6 13 ♞c3 ♞d3 14 ♞g4+ e6 15 ♠d1 h5! and Black successfully counter-attacks in typical Alekhine fashion.

10 ♠d1

Black won in curious style after 10 c4 ♞b4 11 ♞xd7 ♞xd7 12 ♞e4 ♠d8 13 a3 ♞a6 14 ♠e3 ♠e7 15 ♞d2 0-0 16 ♞f3 f6 17 ♠fe1 ♠fe8 18 ♠d2 ♞c7 19 ♠a5 b6

Alekhine Alert!

20 ♖c3 ♕f8 21 ♖ac1 ♜c8 22 h4 h5 23 ♖e2 ♕d6 (Black is slightly cramped but very solid) 24 ♜cc2 ♕f8 25 ♖ed2 b5 26 ♕a5 ♜a6 27 ♖e2 c5 28 dxc5 ♜xc5 29 ♜g6 bxc4 30 ♜xh5 ♜d3 31 ♖e4 (Black got his queenside breaks in; now White should notice Black is up to something and play 31 ♜g4) 31...♜c5! (suddenly winning a piece!) 32 ♜g6 ♜xa5 33 ♜exc4 ♜e5 34 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 35 ♜c7 ♕d6! (a nice back rank trick to finish) 36 g3 0-1 Al.David-C.Bauer, Clichy 2004.



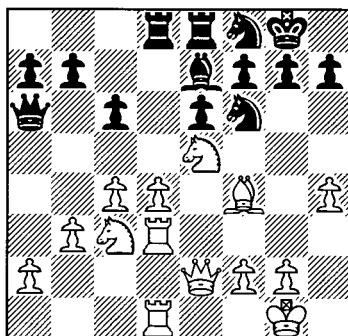
10...♜f6

Black should still be fine with 10...♜xe5. The white pawn wedge on e5 is, generally speaking, not dangerous when White has no attacking king-side knight. After 11 dxe5 ♜c7 12 c4 ♜e7 13 ♕f4 ♜g6 transposes to the note to Black's 9th move, which gives an easy equality.

11 ♜e2 ♕e7 12 c4 0-0 13 ♜c3 ♜e8 14 ♜d3 ♜f8?

The "logical" result of Black's dreadfully passive play – now White just builds up his attack without hindrance. 15 ♕f4 ♜b6 16 ♜ad1 ♜ad8 17 b3 ♜a6

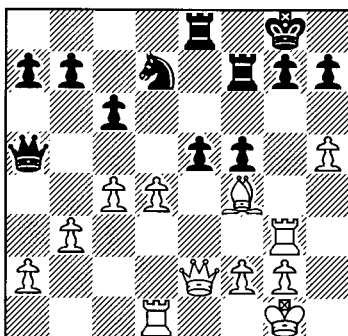
18 h4



18...♜d7 19 h5 ♜xe5

Black finally takes, ten moves too late – and White can even recapture with the bishop, instead of the pawn, increasing his advantage.

20 ♕xe5 f6 21 ♕f4 ♜a5 22 ♜e4 ♜d7 23 ♜g3 f5 24 ♕e5 ♕h4 25 ♜f6+ ♕xf6 26 ♕xf6 ♜f7 27 ♕e5 ♜d7 28 ♕f4 e5?



This desperate pawn pitch makes things worse. 28...♜f6 is better.

29 dxe5 ♜c5 30 ♜e3 ♜e6 31 g3 ♜c7 32 ♜ed3 h6 33 ♜d6 ♜h7 34 ♜f3 ♜e7 35 ♜g2 ♜c7 36 b4 ♜c8 37 a4 ♜fe7 38 ♜d3 ♜f8 39 ♕e3 ♜g8 40 f4 a6 41 ♕c5 ♜xc5 42 bxc5 ♜e8 43 ♜e2 ♜f7 44 ♜g6 1-0

Black put up no resistance in this game – perhaps a reaction to Adams’ surprise on move 9 – but objectively the novelty doesn’t amount to much. White voluntarily exchanges two pieces and so relieves Black of a slightly cramped position (though of course Zhao did not take advantage of this exchanging opportunity).

In the notes to move 9, I point out two clean equalizers for Black: Shabalov’s 10...♔d7 and the “McCutcheon” method.

Summary

White’s best line was seen in Game 35: White keeps the bishop back with 6 ♖e2, plays c2-c4 when he can, and goes for the two bishops. Black gets a marginally worse position that’s very drawable. This is not the most fun in the world, but fortunately White players don’t seem to play this way very often.

Violent tries like an early c2-c4 or g2-g4 or ♖g4 all lead to nothing – the people who are dangerous against the Alekhine are the grinders!

Chapter Five

Exchange Variation: The Ox is not a Scary Animal

Our Hero: Bent Larsen

I'm glad to have escaped the Modern line alive! Now we proceed to the far from terrifying Exchange Variation, which in my experience is the most common line against the Alekhine – and the most fun to play against! First of all, this variation gives no advantage against the prepared Alekhinist and, even better, the game is not too drawish and Black has perfectly reasonable chances to outplay his opponent.

Black does have to know a couple of things, however, and the first one is how to take back when White makes the capture that gives the Exchange Variation its name: After 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 d4 d6 5 exd6 Black has three legal captures, but I only recommend one – take with the e-pawn like this chapter's hero, Bent Larsen!

As for taking toward the centre, I refer you to the following game, and the dreaded headline...

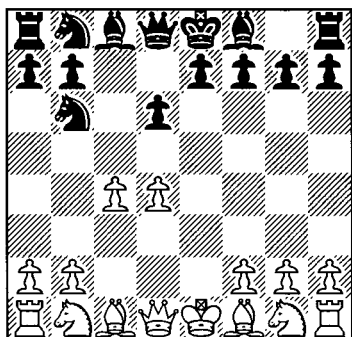
Lines I Don't Like

Game 38
A.Zubarev-R.Aloma Vidal
Athens 2008

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 exd6

The Exchange Variation, far less aggressive than the Modern line or Four Pawns Attack, voluntarily parts with White's e-pawn wedge. Black *should* have nothing to fear here – but he *can* make life difficult for himself with the following recapture.

5...cxd6



This move, even though played with success by Bobby Fischer (see Game 10) is one I *emphatically* do not recommend! The reason is the Voronezh Variation, not known in Fischer's time, which has placed a huge monkey wrench in Black's "taking toward the centre" idea. The point of the Voronezh is that White evacuates the long diagonal, thus preventing counterplay from Black's fianchettoed dark-squared bishop, and utilizes his queenside majority. This leads to a game where White's position is very easy to play, while Black's is insanely difficult. With "enviable" stubbornness, Black players have tried to contend with this, resulting in an explosion of theory which reached its nadir in a note to this game, where John Watson recommends a line by which Black can make a draw on move 33 (if he memorizes every subvariation on the way, of course).

I do not advocate this style of play; I want to enjoy chess and *win* like Lar-

sen, not memorize everything to make a draw. Besides the main game, I've thrown in a few more Voronezhs in the notes to give you the flavour – but I wouldn't take a bite!

Oh, and one more thing: before we get to this simultaneously boring and treacherous variation, I should note that Black could also (besides the correct 5...cxd6) take with the queen (5...Qxd6). While this is tactically sound (6 c5 is answered by 6...Qe6+), it's strategically suspect, as the black queen takes two moves just to block her own bishop. There are eleven games in the database with the position after 5...Qxd6 6 c5 Qe6+: White wins ten of them to one Black win – and that was from 1935, when the far overmatched Michell lost a crushing position against Salo Flohr!

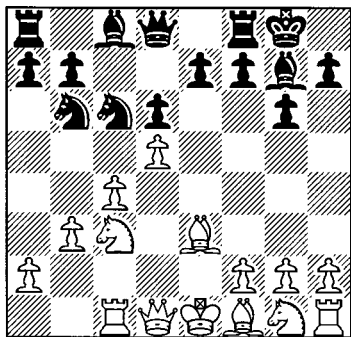
Here's a quick look at this dubious line after the black queen checks: 7 Qe2 Qd5 8 Qf3 Qd7 (or 8...f6 9 O-O Qd7 10 Qc4 c6 11 Qe1 Qa6 12 Qb3 Qac7 13 Qc3 e6 14 Qd2 Qe7 15 Qe2 O-O 16 Qae1, when White had a big advantage after playing simple moves and won easily in D.Mikulas-A.Galan, Slovakian Team Ch. 1994) 9 O-O e6 10 Qc3 Qe7 11 Qe1 O-O 12 Qe5 Qd8 13 Qxd5 exd5 14 Qd3 Qf6 15 Qf4 and White had a dominating position in R.Michell-S.Flohr, Hastings 1935/36.

6 Qc3 g6 7 Qe3 Qg7 8 Qc1 O-O 9 b3 e5

A key point is seen here: if Black makes the natural developing move 9...Qc6, then White just plays 10 d5

Alekhine Alert!

with a space advantage. The open long diagonal means nothing for Black as the rook is off the line and the c3-knight is protected. Local Los Angeles GM Melikset Khachiyan fell victim to this vs. IM Altounian.

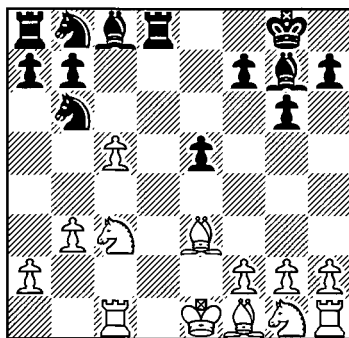


The GM never equalized and couldn't hold the ending – a typical fate for those who wish to follow the rules and capture toward the centre these days! 10...dxe5 11 e2 e6 12 f4 dxd7 13 dxe6 e7 14 f3 (White can play simply for the ending, as Black's pawn structure will be broken no matter what tricks he tries) 14...dxc5 15 f5! gxf5 16 exf7+ Kxf7 17 g5 e8 18 b5 d4 19 dxd6 dxd6 20 exd6 d7 21 Kc2 d6 22 O-O d4 23 d8 d8 24 d8 (White is a pawn up in the ending and still possesses the Voronezh's not so secret weapon: the queenside pawn majority) 24...f4 25 g5 d4+ 26 h1 xg5 27 xg5 f5 28 d2 e3 29 d5 e8 30 f3 e4 31 xe4 xe4 32 h6 e8 33 h3 f6 34 g5 g6 35 xf4 f8 36 g3 xg3 37 xg3 xf1+ 38 g2 a1 39 f3 g1

40 d7 xa2 41 xb7 (the ending with the extra, passed c-pawn presents no problems) 41...b6 42 e5 a3 43 g7+ f8 44 d6+ xg7 45 xa3 f6 46 d6 g1 47 g4 a6 48 h5 e3 49 f8 f5 50 h6 f2 51 d2 e4 52 h6 b6 53 b4 f2 54 c5 g3 55 xh7 d3 56 g5 c4 57 e7 d5 58 d8 1-0 L.Altounian-M.Khachiyan, Costa Mesa 2003.

10 dxe5 dxe5 11 xd8 xd8 12 c5

A modern tabiya: White has an active queenside pawn majority and stands at least slightly better, though it seems some theoreticians think Black can draw if he has superb memorization skills.



For my part, I am absolutely stunned that Alekhine players voluntarily submit to this suffering – what is the purpose? Since the line is so booked up, and very popular with GMs, this means your regular under-2500 player is fighting not only against his opponent at the board, but also against all the strong GMs who play the white side of this, *and* their even stronger com-

puters! And if Black memorizes furiously, walks some incredibly narrow path, then he might make a draw –

Maybe.

12...♖d67

Black already has to avoid the instant death of 12...♖d5 13 ♜d1 – and so must block his own pieces. Meanwhile White can follow with logical developing moves.

13 ♖f3 ♗c6 14 ♜c4 ♖a5

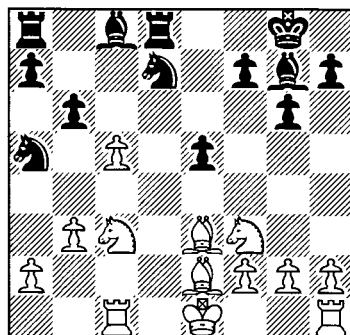
The problem with this position is that, as I've already mentioned, White's game is so easy to play: he's well ahead in development and all he has to do is advance his queenside pawns. Black's kingside counterplay is a long way from coming, and first he has to perform great feats just to get his queenside pieces out. In the following two games Phil Adams and GM Michael Adams make it look easy – probably because it was!

14...h6 15 0-0 ♖f8 16 ♖e4 ♜e6 17 ♖d6 ♜d7 18 ♜b5 ♜b8 19 ♖xb7! (already decisive) 19...♜dxb7 20 ♜xc6 ♜c7 21 ♜a4 f5 22 c6 ♜d8 23 ♜fd1 ♜xd1+ 24 ♜xd1 ♜f7 25 ♜d8 ♜h7 26 ♖xe5 ♜xe5 27 ♜xf8 ♜e7 28 ♜c5 ♜c7 29 ♜a8 ♜g7 30 ♜xa7 ♜xa7 31 ♜xa7 (now that's a queenside majority!) 31...♜c7 32 g3 ♜f6 33 ♜d4+ ♜e7 34 ♜g7 h5 35 ♜h6 ♜d5 36 ♜g5+ ♜e6 37 ♜f1 ♜f3 38 ♜e1 ♜a5+ 39 ♜d2 ♜c7 40 b4 ♖d5 41 ♜e3 ♜c4 42 ♜d2 h4 43 a3 ♖d5 44 ♜f4 hxg3 45 fxg3 ♜xf4 46 gxf4 ♖d6 47 ♜f2 1-0 P.Adams-P.Crocker, Manchester 2002.

In a later game GM Adams won a

little faster with 15 ♖e4 ♜e8 16 0-0 ♜e7 17 ♖d6 ♖f8 18 ♖xc8 ♜xc8 19 ♖d2 ♖a5 20 b4 ♖xc4 21 ♖xc4 ♖e6 22 ♜fd1 ♖d4 23 ♜f1 ♜d8 24 ♜d2 ♜ed7 25 ♜cd1 f5 26 f4 exf4 27 ♜xf4 g5 28 ♜e5 ♜xe5 29 ♖xe5 ♜d5 30 ♖c4 ♜5d7 31 ♜f2 and the pin was decisive 1-0 M.Adams-M.Santo Roman, French Team Ch. 2004.

15 ♜e2 b6

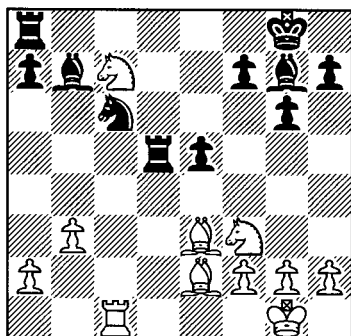


16 cxb6

Supposedly Black can make a draw after 16 b4, at least in analysis! – 16...♖c6 17 b5 ♖d4 18 c6 ♖c5 19 0-0 a6 20 ♜c4 ♜e6 (here's Watson's improvement, and so what the Black player needs to memorize: 20...axb5 21 ♜xb5 ♜e6 22 ♜fd1 ♜f6 23 h3 ♜ac8 24 ♜xd4 exd4 25 ♖a4 ♖xa4 26 ♜xa4 ♜c7 27 ♜b1 b5 28 ♜xb5 ♜xa2 29 ♜b4 ♜d5 30 ♖xd4 ♜xc6 31 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 32 ♖xc6 ♜xd1+ 33 ♜h2 with a draw) 21 ♜xe6 ♖cxe6 22 a4 axb5 23 axb5 ♜a3 24 ♜h1 ♖c7 25 ♖xd4 exd4 26 ♜f4 dxc3 27 ♜xc7 ♜d5 28 ♜xb6 ♜xb5 29 c7 (Black is dead) 29...♜a8 30 ♜fd1 ♜f6 31 ♜d4 ♜e7 32 ♜xc3 ♜c8 33 ♜e3 (a recurring picture in the Voronezh – we see the

white c-pawn going through) 33...♖b7 34 ♙f4 ♗f8 35 g4 ♜b4 36 ♙g3 ♜xg4 37 ♜b3 ♜c4 38 ♜b8 ♜e8 39 ♜e1 ♜c6 40 ♙d6! ♜xd6 41 ♜xe8+ 1-0 D.Daulyte-Nguyen Thu Giang, Dresden 2008.

16...♙xb6 17 0-0 ♙b7 18 ♜fd1 ♙c6 19 ♙b5 ♙d5 20 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 21 ♙c7



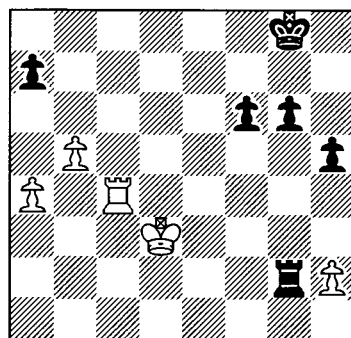
21...♙d4

Don't worry, we're still in book: Black is trying to improve on the following debacle, which sees famous Alekhine expert GM Zoltan Varga (our hero in Chapter Nine) switching sides – and why not if Black players want to submit to this torture? 21...♜dd8 22 ♙xa8 ♙xa8 23 ♙b5 ♙d4 24 ♙xd4 exd4 25 ♙g5 f6 26 ♙d2 ♙d5 27 ♜c7 ♜b8 28 ♙a6 f5 29 ♜xa7 ♜e8 30 ♙b5 ♜b8 31 ♙d3 h6 32 h4 h5 33 f3 ♙f7 34 ♙f2 ♙f6 35 g3 ♜c8 36 b4 ♙c4 37 ♙xc4+ ♜xc4 38 ♙e2 ♜c2 39 b5 ♜b2 40 a4 ♙e5 41 f4 ♙f6 42 ♜b7 ♜b3 43 a5 ♜xg3 44 a6 d3+ 45 ♙f2 ♜g4 46 a7 ♙d4+ 47 ♙f3 ♙xa7 48 ♜xa7 ♜xh4 49 b6 (just for variety, we see the white b-pawn going through this time) 1-0 Z.Varga-G.Llanos, Budapest 1999.

22 ♙xd4 exd4 23 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 24 ♙d2

Black has “succeeded” in his aim: White is slightly better as the potential outside passed pawn (that queenside pawn majority) is stronger than Black’s passed but blocked d-pawn, but the plus equals position maybe should be drawn (now that’s success!).

24...h5 25 ♙c4 ♙xc4 26 ♜xc4 d3 27 ♙f1 ♜d8 28 b4 ♙d4 29 a4 ♜d7 30 b5 f6 31 ♙e1 ♜e7+ 32 ♙e3 ♙xe3 33 fxe3 ♜xe3+ 34 ♙d2 ♜e2+ 35 ♙xd3 ♜xg2



36 ♜c7?

White blunders a pawn. Correct is the zwischenzug 36 ♜c2! ♜g4 (but not 36...♜xc2?? 37 ♙xc2 ♙f7 38 a5 ♙e6 39 b6 axb6 40 a6! and, moving leftward, this time it’s the a-pawn that queens!) 37 ♜c8+ ♙f7 38 ♜c7+ ♙e6 39 ♜xa7 reaching an endgame highly typical for the variation: Black, after playing well for 36 moves, is left with an uphill struggle to draw (yes, still plus equals – the two white connected passed pawns are stronger than Black’s slower three to one majority with only one passed pawn), if indeed a draw is possible.

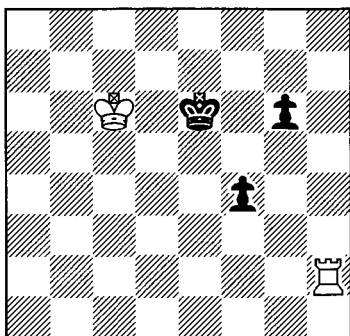
36...♖xh2 37 ♖xa7 ♜b2 38 ♔c4 h4 39 a5 h3 40 ♖d7 h2 41 ♖d1 ♔f7 42 a6

Even a pawn down White draws easily, while Black must be careful, as the white queenside pawns are so dangerous.

42...♞a2 43 ♔c5 ♔e6 44 b6 ♞a5+ 45 ♔c6 ♞xa6 46 ♜h1 ♞a2 47 b7 ♜c2+ 48 ♔b6 ♞b2+ 49 ♔c7 f5?!

Black should be happy to take the draw with 49...♜c2+, although all is not lost yet.

50 ♖xh2! ♖xb7+ 51 ♔xb7 f4 52 ♔c6



52...g5?

As the tablebase informs us, this loses as White's king can cross over. Both 52...♔e5 and 52...f3 will draw. Let's look at the second, which is more forcing: 52...f3 53 ♞f2 (if 53 ♔c5, 53...♔e5 54 ♔c4 ♔e4 shuts the white king out and draws easily) 53...g5 54 ♞xf3 ♔e5 55 ♔c5 (or 55 ♞g3 ♔f4 56 ♞a3 g4 with a routine draw) 55...g4 56 ♞f8 ♔e4 57 ♞g8 ♔f3 58 ♔d4 g3 59 ♔d3 (or 59 ♞f8+ ♔e2 60 ♞g8 ♔f2 and White can't improve his position) 59...g2 60 ♞f8+ (60 ♔d2 ♔f2 is much the same)

60...♔g3 and White can only take perpetual or give up his rook for the pawn.

53 ♔c5 g4 54 ♔d4 g3 55 ♜h8 ♔f5 56 ♞g8 f3 57 ♞xg3 ♔f4 58 ♞g8 f2 59 ♞f8+ 1-0

Two things, as Ving Rhames would say:

1. Black only obtained a clear drawing position (which he was unable to draw) after White blundered a pawn on move 36.

2. If White had played the correct 36 ♜c2, maintaining material equality while obtaining connected passed pawns, Black would have still had a painful defence.

The games given in the notes don't inspire confidence either. Again, Black must be extremely well prepared and fight to the death to draw the ending.

Meanwhile, in the line I recommend, Black faces none of these problems, equalizes easily and can play for a win like the great Bent Larsen!

I don't quite recommend this, but we're getting there!

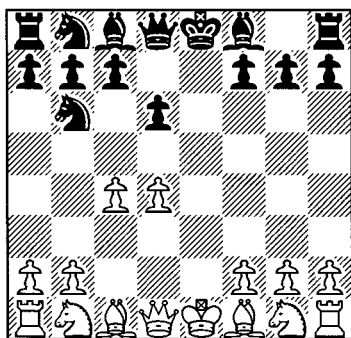
Game 39 J.Emms-N.Davies Southend 2002

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 exd6 exd6!

One advantage of this recapture is that ...exd6 vacates e7 for the king's bishop, which does not have to lose

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time fianchettoing. Now Black is slightly ahead in development, while White's only advantage is a little more space. Basically Black is a bit cramped; if he exchanges one pair of minor pieces he's fine; if he exchanges two then he's more than fine and can play for an advantage, as White's advanced pawns can become weak. The reason I don't recommend Davies' line is that he goes to considerable lengths to keep all the minor pieces on the board, which leads to a traffic jam that gives White chances.



6 ♖d3 ♘e7

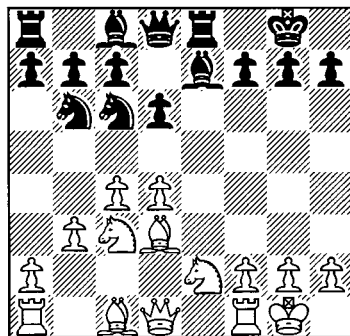
The repertoire move I recommend here is 6...♗c6, with a direct threat to the d-pawn, and the positional idea ...♗b4. Black usually gets a piece or two off in that variation. I'm putting this game in to show what happens when the board stays cluttered with pieces while Black has less space.

Full analysis of the early ...♗c6 will follow in the remaining games of this chapter.

7 ♗e2 0-0 8 ♗bc3 ♗c6 9 0-0 ♖e8

The author of a previous book on the Alekhine's Defence, Davies plays one of his own recommendations.

10 b3



The problem for Black after this move is that if ...♗b4 now, White can play ♙b1, preserving the bishop, as c4 is defended.

10...♙f8 11 h3 ♗b4 12 ♙e3

I don't understand either player's moves here. Why not 12 ♙b1, and then why does Black not exchange with 12...♗xd3 - ?

I think the former gives White the edge, as in the game, while the latter gives Black good chances to equalize, as we will see later in this chapter.

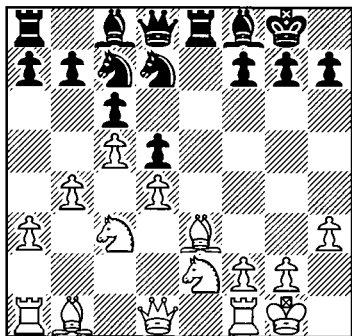
12...c6 13 ♙b1

Now there are too many black pieces and, with White's nagging space edge, not enough squares to accommodate them. Transferring the well-placed knight on c6 to c7 (one step backward) by using three moves does not seem to be the best idea.

13...d5 14 a3 ♗a6 15 c5 ♗d7 16 b4 ♗c7

To me this position looks clearly fa-

avourable to White, when you compare the activity of the respective pieces, and add in White's queenside space – it's time to strike!



17 d3

17 b5! is best, and Black has no satisfactory answer: note again the cluttered pieces on his queenside – it would definitely help if at least one had been exchanged. Black can try:

a) 17...dxb5 18 dxb5 cxb5 19 dxc3 and White recovers the pawn with advantage.

b) 17...dxf6 18 bxc6 bxc6 19 d3 with queenside pressure and space.

c) 17...cxb5 18 dxf4 dxf6 19 d3 d7 20 Bb1 a6 21 a4 dxc6 (not 21...bxa4 22 Bxb7 and the powerful rook gives White a clear plus, while the black apawns are weak) 22 axb5 axb5 23 dxb5 dxb5 24 dxb5 and Black, with two permanent weaknesses at b7 and d5, faces a painful defence for a long time to come.

17...b6

Black gets some counterplay.

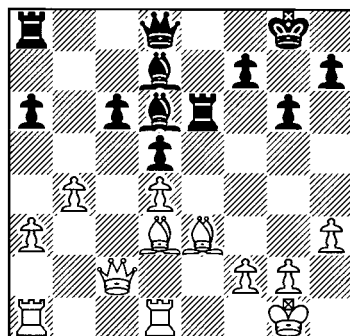
18 Bb3 dxe6 19 Bfd1 a6 20 cxb6

Even now 20 dxf4, maintaining the pawn chain, gives White some advantage.

20...dxb6 21 da4 dxa4 22 Bxa4 d7 23 dxf4 g6!

Black dodges 23...c5?! 24 Bc2! and maintains his important defensive light-squared bishop.

24 dxe6 Bxe6 25 Bc2 d6 1/2-1/2



Black has set up a solid defensive position, and note that with two pairs of minor pieces off, his game is not bad.

The Lines I Like Begin Here!

Game 40

A.Gipslis-B.Larsen

Sousse Interzonal 1967

1 e4 d6

"If White is very sure that it [Alekhine's Defence] is very bad, then I like to play it with Black!" Larsen comments, and he's right. If White treats the Alekhine with respect, like Anand,

Alekhine Alert!

and aims for a marginal edge with 4 f3 , then it is a hard opening. If White plays casually (as if anything can win against such a “bad” opening), then the Alekhine is great fun to play!

2 e5 d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 b6 5 exd6 exd6

Now that we’ve seen what not to do...

I think this is one of the easiest and most harmless variations of the Alekhine: Black can play against it with confidence as long as he remembers one specific move order and some general ideas. I’ll run through all that in the course of the game, but first let’s note that Larsen played the black side of the Exchange Variation with 5...exd6 six times against GM opposition, and defeated Yudovich, Kavalek, Adorjan, Giplis and Matanovic (how’s that for a fabulous score with Black – 5 wins vs. stellar opposition) and only gave up one draw to Parma, and that didn’t have to happen, as Larsen tricked himself into a bad move order.

In that game White played 4 f3 , and we already know that Black should play 4...dxe5 (as Larsen has played himself – Games 17 and 24). But Larsen experimented with 4... c6 (more on this in the following game, where this provocative move order worked for him), and after 5 c4 b6 6 e2 f5 7 exd6 exd6 White had succeeded in transposing to a favourable Exchange Variation where Black’s light-squared bishop should be – but isn’t – on g4 (the bishop on g4 indirectly threatens

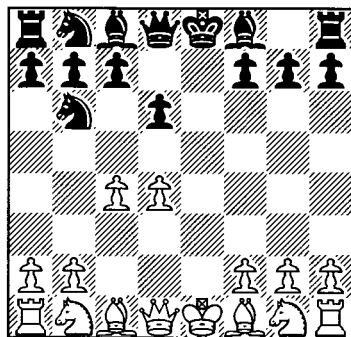
both c4 and d4 due to ... xf3 possibilities).

White continued with 8 0-0 e7 9 c3 f6 10 e3 0-0 11 c1 d5 12 c5, and now Black should settle for the cramped 12... c8 , but lost a pawn after 12... c4 ? 13 xd5 ! xd5 14 xc4 , yet still somehow swindled his way to a draw in B.Parma-B.Larsen, Beverwijk 1964.

Since one cannot count on such swindles, keep the correct move order in mind – but here I’m only asking you to have it down for six or seven moves, not thirty-three!! Here are my recommendations, based on the study of Larsen’s five big wins and my own analysis:

Our repertoire so far: 1 e4 f6 2 e5 d5 3 d4 d6 and now if 4 f3 dxe5.

If White goes in for the Exchange Variation, we have 4 c4 b6 5 exd6 exd6!



and now, as one might expect, White’s most common moves are the three obvious developments 6 c3 , 6 f3 and 6 d3 , given in order of popu-

larity. Here's our repertoire against these moves:

a) 6 ♖c3 ♖c6! – exact: by threatening the d-pawn, Black prevents the very solid, even machine-like system composed of ♖c3/♗d3/♗e2 which White could have reached in this game (note to White's 7th move). Black has prevented 7 ♗d3 and is ready to meet 7 d5 by 7...♗e5 and 7 ♖f3 by 7...♗g4 with pressure on d4. See Games 42 and 43 for this precise move order.

b) 6 ♖f3 ♗g4! – exact: by playing this immediately, Black makes sure he obtains the pin. He will follow with ...♖c6 and his minor pieces will pressure White's advanced pawns. Larsen reaches this type of position in both Games 40 and 41 by transposition.

c) 6 ♗d3 ♖c6! – exact: we saw Black play 6...♗e7 in Game 39 and end up with a cramped game. After the correct 6...♖c6, it's obvious 7 ♖f3 is met by ♗g4 as in 'b'. However, if White tries 7 ♗e2 to avoid the pin, Black strikes with 7...♖b4 and equalizes at once. If 8 ♗e4, then 8...d5 neatly isolates White's centre pawn, while Black has an easy game after 8 0-0 ♖xd3 9 ♔xd3, as he has freed his position due to the exchange of minor pieces, and gained the two bishops besides.

That's pretty much all you need to know to play this variation with Black – but if you want to memorize 33 Voronezh moves, be my guest!

Oh, I should mention that the odd attacking move 6 ♔f3 is also met by

6...♖c6 (Game 44) and non-developing pawn moves (6 a4 and 6 h3) are covered in Game 45 – Black should answer those two with 6...a5 and 6...♖c6, respectively.

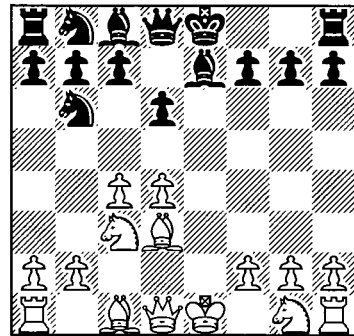
Now if you know this much, you can play for a win, not a draw!

6 ♖c3 ♗e7

My preferred move order once again is 6...♖c6 7 ♗e3 ♗e7 8 ♗e2 0-0 9 ♖f3 ♗g4, reaching the game position, which is fine for Black – whereas after Larsen's actual move, White could have dodged this – see the next note.

7 ♗e3

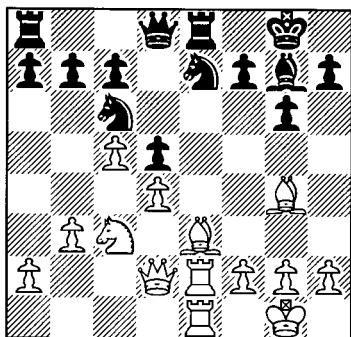
White could avoid Larsen's counterplay in the game by playing 7 ♗d3! here.



I mentioned this set-up above: White plans an unshakeable position with the coming ♖g1-e2, so there is no pin with ...♗g4 (White has f2-f3) and a Black ...♖b4 won't get the two bishops, as White can tactically defend c4 for long enough. This solid line has given White many victories, or you could say Alekhine players have had many sad

defeats against this – to name three: Wonderboy Magnus Carlsen; Grandmaster Tigran Nalbandian, and yours truly! A look at these debacles is instructive:

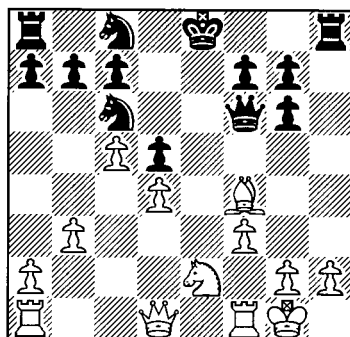
a) Wonderboy crashes: 7 ♔d3! ♛c6 8 ♞ge2 (White has set up his system) 8... ♙f6 9 ♙e3 0-0 (Black can't play 9... ♛b4 10 ♙b1 ♛xc4?? on account of 11 ♞a4+ winning a piece, but now ... ♛b4 is threatened) 10 b3 (White simply eliminates the positional threat: of course if 10... ♛b4 White keeps his bishop and stays solid with 11 ♙b1 , as the c4-pawn is protected) 10... ♞e8 11 0-0 ♙g4 12 ♞d2 d5 13 c5 ♙xe2 14 ♙xe2 ♛c8 (Black can't shake the white position at all and becomes ever more cramped, while Ivanchuk enjoys the two bishops and soon the e-file) 15 ♞fe1 ♛8e7 16 ♙g4! g6 17 ♞e2 ♙g7 18 ♞ae1



18... ♛f5 (the computer gives this as its number one pick, and evidently Magnus could not find anything better, but now Black gets permanent weaknesses and his long-term chances of

survival are slim; still, I can't find anything better, as the obvious 18...f5 or 18...h5 also create kingside weaknesses, while sitting tight won't last long with ♙g5 coming) 19 ♙xf5 gxf5 20 ♙h6 ♞xe2 21 ♛xe2 ♞f6 22 ♙xg7 ♞xg7 23 ♞d1 ♞e8 24 f3 ♛e7 25 ♛g3 ♞f6 26 ♞e1 ♙f8 27 ♞e5 c6 28 ♛h5 ♞g6 29 ♛f4 ♞f6 30 ♞e3 h6 31 g3 ♞c8 32 ♙f2 b6 33 h4 ♞d8 34 ♛h5 ♞g6 35 ♞xe7 ♞xh5 36 ♞xa7 ♞e8 (Magnus has sacrificed a pawn to finally get some e-file counterplay, but Ivanchuk has a surprise ready) 37 ♞xe8+! ♙xe8 38 cxb6 f4 39 b7 fxg3+ 40 ♙g2 and this looks like a "domination" problem: Black is a queen up – and helpless! 1-0 V.Ivanchuk-M.Carlsen, World Blitz Ch., Moscow 2007.

b) Grandmaster's king burns in the centre: 7 ♔d3! ♛c6 8 ♞ge2 ♙g4 9 f3 (no pin!) 9... ♙h5 10 0-0 ♙g6 11 ♙xg6 hxg6 12 b3 ♙f6 13 ♛e4 d5 14 ♛xf6+ ♞xf6 15 c5 ♛c8 16 ♙f4

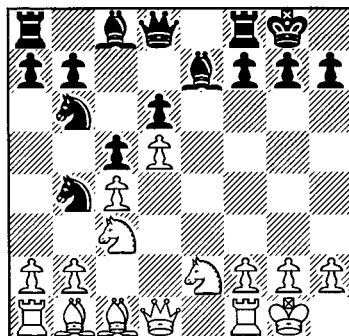


16... ♙d7? (Black has to live with the plus equals; he can actually hold after 16... ♞d8 17 ♛c3 ♛8e7 18 ♛b5 ♞c8

with ...a7-a6 coming; so White should probably just play 18 ♖e1 0-0 19 g4, when Black is cramped and miserable but still in the game for all that) 17 ♗d2 ♗h4 18 b4 a6 19 a4 (now it's clear that the king move was a mistake, as White's attack is just too strong) 19...♙d8 20 b5 ♙e7 21 ♗a5 ♖c8 22 ♖fe1 g5 23 ♙g3 ♗h6 24 ♙c3 ♙dc6 (a spirited try: Black wins material, temporarily, but his king is cut off from escape) 25 ♖xe7+! ♙xe7 26 ♖e1 ♖hd8 27 c6+ bxc6 28 bxa6 ♙f5? 29 ♙xd5! cxd5 30 ♗xd5+ ♙d6 31 ♙xd6 ♗xd6 (White has a great trick mate after 31...cxd6 32 ♗xf7+ ♙c6 33 ♗b7 mate!) 32 ♗xf7+ ♙c6 33 ♖e6 ♖a8 34 ♖xd6+ ♖xd6 35 ♗c4+ ♙d7 36 ♗b5+ ♙e7 37 ♗xg5+ ♙f8 38 ♗c5 ♖axa6 39 ♗xc7 ♖ac6 40 ♗b8+ ♙f7 41 h4 (White has consolidated with four extra pawns, but Black plays on to the bitter end) 41...g6 42 a5 ♙d7 43 ♗b3+ ♙f6 44 ♗b5 ♖dd6 45 ♙h2 ♙e7 46 ♙g3 ♙d8 47 d5 ♖a6 48 ♙f4 ♖f6+ 49 ♙e4 ♙e7 50 g4 ♙f7 51 ♗b7+ ♙f8 52 ♙e5 ♙e8 53 ♗c8+ ♙e7 54 ♗c7+ 1-0 Art.Minasian-T.Nalbandian, Armenian Ch., Yerevan 1999.

c) IM devours poisonous pawn: 7 ♙d3! 0-0 8 ♙ge2 ♙c6 9 0-0 ♙b4 10 ♙b1 c5 (it's obvious enough that 10...♙xc4? loses to 11 a3 ♙c6 12 ♙d3, but I became obsessed with making the pawn snatch work, which isn't really possible) 11 d5

(see following diagram)



11...♙xc4? (this really is poisoned; I should accept the dreaded plus equals and play 11...♙d7, when the knight at least reroutes to f6 and defends my kingside) 12 a3 ♗a5 (my dubious idea) 13 axb4 ♗xa1 14 ♙d3! (the refutation) 14...g6 15 ♗xc4 cxb4 16 ♙a2! (even better than 16 ♗xb4, as Black now has to pay too much to get his queen out) bxc3 17 ♙xc3 ♙f5 18 ♗b3 ♙d3 19 ♙d1 ♖fc8 20 ♙d2 ♙c2 21 ♖xa1 ♙xb3 22 ♙xb3 ♙f6 23 ♙f1 a6 24 ♙b1 b5 25 ♙e4 ♙e7 26 ♙b4 ♖d8 27 ♙a5 ♖d7 28 ♙c3 f5 29 ♙f6+ ♙xf6 30 ♙xf6 a5 31 ♙d1 a4 32 ♙c3 ♖c8 33 ♙e2 ♖c5 34 ♙d1 ♙b7 35 ♙b4 ♖c2 36 ♙xd6 ♙xb2 37 ♙e5 ♖c2 38 d6 ♖c8 39 ♙f3 ♖d7 40 ♙d5+ ♙f8 41 ♙e6 ♙e8 42 ♙xd7+ ♙xd7 43 ♖b1 ♖c5 44 f4 g5 45 g3 g4 46 ♙e2 ♙c6 47 ♙d2 ♖d5+ 48 ♙c2 ♖c5+ 49 ♙b2 ♖d5 50 ♖c1+ ♙b6 51 ♖c2 b4 52 ♖c4 ♙b5 53 ♖d4 ♖c5 54 d7 a3+ 55 ♙b1 b3 56 ♙d1 1-0 R.Dellaca-T.Taylor, Los Angeles 2005.

I trust the reader would not like to add his name to the roster of defeats above, which is why move order is cru-

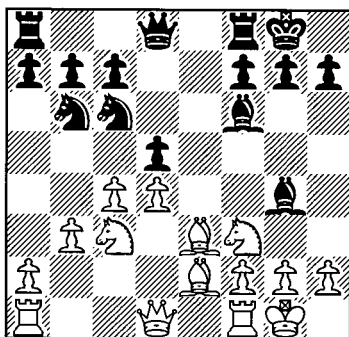
cial at least up to move 6. By playing exactly as I have shown, Black prevents White from setting up his solid machine, and creates good counterplay.

7...0-0 8 ♖e2 ♜c6 9 ♜f3 ♖g4

Now that Larsen has dodged the reef, Black has a typical sound development with counterplay, and can already be said to have an equal game. The position is complicated and far from drawish; unlike in the Voronezh, Black can simply play chess here and try to win!

But remember that Larsen should not have reached this happy position by the move order he chose; but he could have reached it by the correct order I gave, namely 6...♜c6!.

10 b3 ♖f6 11 0-0 d5



The key counter-attack: Black fixes White's centre pawn at d4, where it is directly attacked by the f6-bishop and c6-knight, indirectly attacked by the g4-bishop, and even the Alekhine knight sometimes reroutes via c8-e7-f5 to attack the pawn again!

12 c5 ♜c8 13 b4

"This move accomplishes very little here" – Larsen. Since White has no queenside majority, pushing the b-pawn just leaves weak squares in its wake – in this case the c6-knight, far from being driven back, soon advances via a5 to c4.

Larsen considers 13 h3 to be best; see the next game for his reaction to that move.

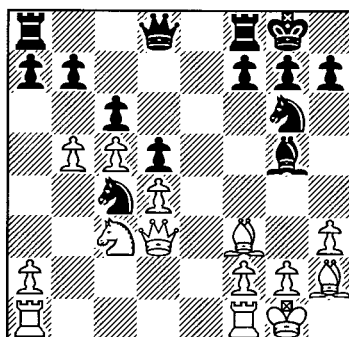
13...♜8e7

Of course not 13...♜xb4? 14 ♖b1 and White recovers the pawn with advantage.

14 b5 ♜a5 15 h3 ♖xf3 16 ♖xf3 c6 17 ♜d3

If 17 ♖e2 ♜f5 with good counterplay – White can't shut out both of Black's active knights.

17...♜c4 18 ♖f4 ♜g6 19 ♖h2 ♖g5!



A clever move: Black sees that direct attack on d4 won't win the game, so he creates some kingside play, only to strike at d4 later when White least expects it!

20 bxc6 bxc6 21 ♖d1 ♖f4

Black has played a nice game so far

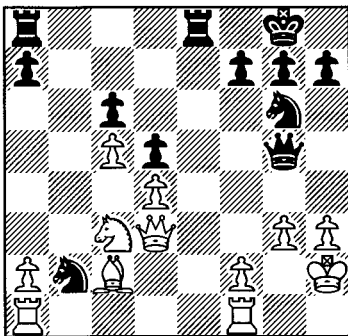
and has good squares for his pieces, but he doesn't have any advantage – yet! Black's queen's knight, well posted in White's territory, is very strong – so White should get rid of it: 22 ♖b3 is best, which leads to equality in all lines, most bluntly by 22...♙xh2+ 23 ♙xh2 ♖a5 24 ♙c2 ♖c4 25 ♖b3 etc. I get the feeling the Giplis did not want to play for a draw against such a "bad opening" – so he plays for a win and loses!

For the record, other variations after 22 ♖b3 are 22...♙xh2+ 23 ♙xh2 ♜f6 24 ♙xc4 ♖f4 25 ♜d2 dxc4 with a double-edged but equal game, or 22...♞d2 23 ♜fd1 (23 ♙xf4? ♞xf4 24 ♜xd2 ♜g5 wins the queen) 23...♙xh2+ 24 ♙xh2 ♞xb3 25 axb3 ♜b8+ 26 g3 ♜xb3 27 ♜db1 ♜c4 28 ♜xc4 dxc4 29 ♜b4 with, as Larsen says, "a rather drawish endgame".

22 ♙c2 ♙xh2+ 23 ♙xh2 ♜f6 24 g3 ♜fe8!

White can't oppose on the open file because f2 falls; Black's advantage is getting serious...

25 ♙g2 ♜g5 26 ♙h2 ♞b2!



...and is now decisive!

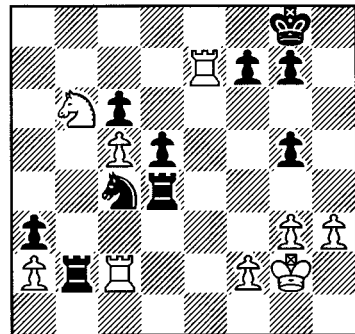
"I am surprised every time such simple means lead to a winning position against a Grandmaster," writes Larsen.

One sees that the little respected knight on c4 (Giplis could have chased it off, with a draw, if he wanted) now strikes the death blow, as Black wins the d-pawn. I think there were psychological factors in play: White was reluctant to admit that Black was obtaining an excellent position with this defence (without, as Larsen points out, doing anything very complicated) and so could not bring himself to play for equalization –

And now that the light bulb is on, it's too late!

27 ♜f3 ♜d2 28 ♙xg6 hxg6 29 ♞d1 ♞c4

Black keeps his strong knight – the d4-pawn isn't going anywhere, 30 ♜c3 ♜ab8 31 ♜c1 ♜e4 32 ♜c2 ♜xd4 33 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 34 ♜e1 a5 35 ♙g2 a4 36 ♞c3 a3 37 ♞a4 g5 38 ♜e7 ♜b4 39 ♞b6 ♜b2



A typical Larsen rook pawn and rook attack, sealing the win.

**40 ♖c3 ♖xa2 41 ♜xc4 dxc4 42 ♖c7
 ♖dd2 43 ♖f3 c3 0-1**

After the best defence 44 ♖xc3 (if 44 ♖xc6 ♖xf2+ 45 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 46 ♖xf2 c2 and Black queens; the same thing happens after 44 ♖xf7 ♖xf2+ 45 ♖xf2 ♖xf2+ 46 ♖xf2 c2, while if 44 ♖xc7 c2 45 ♖f8+ ♖h7 46 ♖c3 ♖a1 Black wins a rook) 44... ♖xf2+ 45 ♖g1 ♖g2+ 46 ♖h1 ♖gb2 47 ♖c1 ♖h2+ 48 ♖g1 ♖ag2+ 49 ♖f1 a2 50 ♖a7 (if 50 ♖xc6 ♖h1+ 51 ♖xg2 ♖xc1 wins quickly) 50... ♖xg3 51 ♖c4 ♖gxh3 52 ♖ca4 ♖h1+ 53 ♖g2 a1 ♖ 54 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 55 ♖xa1 ♖c3 56 ♖a5 f5 Black comes out three good pawns ahead.

This is one of Larsen's great wins, but one should note Black's opening moves were not quite precise. The middlegame was quite interesting, as the Soviet GM just could not believe that Black's "simple means" had pushed him to the point of draw or death!

One sees that Black had middle-game counterplay across the board, from the knight on c4 to the queen + knight kingside attack on the far wing.

Game 41
M. Yudovich-B. Larsen
Moscow 1962

1 e4 ♖c6

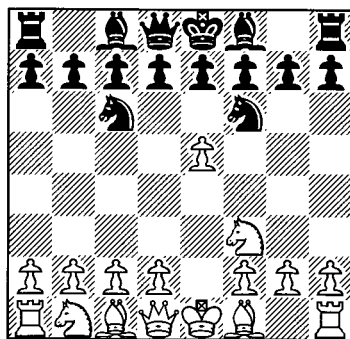
Larsen often reached Alekhine's Defence by way of the Nimzowitsch Defence – but it's not a very smooth path!

1... ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♖b6 5 exd6 exd6 6 ♖f3 ♖c6 is the same 6th move position by an Alekhine move order.

2 ♖f3

As a former Nimzowitsch Defence player myself, I recognize this as White's best move, but if you play 1... ♖c6 as Black you have to also be prepared for White's old main line, 2 d4.

2... ♖f6 3 e5



3... ♖d5

In his book *Play* 1... ♖c6, Christoph Wisniewski recommends 3... ♖g4 4 d4, but I have a problem with moving the king's knight three times to get to h6, where it will soon be driven after 4... d6 5 h3.

4 d4 d6 5 c4

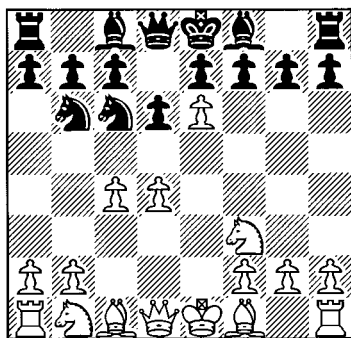
5 ♖b5 is also dangerous – in my opinion, playing this move order means too much opening preparation!

5... ♖b6 6 exd6

White settles for the non-threatening Exchange Variation.

One recalls from the previous game

(note to move 5) that Larsen ran into trouble against Parma's simple 6 ♖e2 – but the real problem with this line, usually reached via the Alekhine move order 1 e4 ♟f6 2 e5 ♟d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♟f3 ♟c6!? 5 c4 ♟b6, is that White has a dangerous “obstructive” sacrifice, 6 e6!.

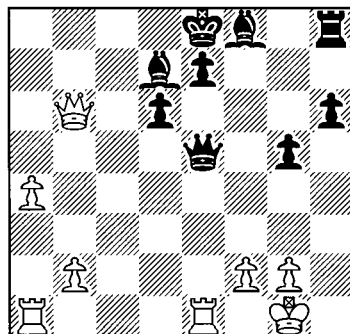


After 6...fxe6 (Black must take with the pawn in view of the fork on d5) Black has a central pawn mass, but a weak kingside and difficult development. Play is extremely sharp – one recalls Marcinkiewicz's queen sacrifice from the Introduction, and here are a few more examples:

a) Cautionary tale: Black better know this before taking it out for a spin – might be a short ride! 7 ♟g5 ♞d7 (Marcinkiewicz played 7...e5 here) 8 ♖d3 e5?? 9 ♞h5+ 1-0 K.Richter-W.Jurgschat, Berlin 1948.

b) Tal at his wildest – but forgetful! 7 h4 e5 8 d5 ♟d4 9 ♟xd4 exd4 10 ♖d3 ♞d7 11 ♖g5 h6 12 ♖d2 ♞g4 13 ♖e2 ♞e4 14 0-0 ♖f5 15 ♟a3 ♞xh4 16 ♟b5 d3 17 ♟xc7+ (forcing the black king to move) 17...♖d8 18 ♟xa8 dxe2 19 ♞xe2

♟xa8 20 c5 ♞e4 21 ♞b5 ♞xd5 22 ♖a5+ b6 23 ♜fd1 ♞e5 24 a4 ♖d7 25 cxb6 axb6 26 ♖xb6+ ♖e8 27 ♞a6 ♟xb6 28 ♞xb6 g5 29 ♜e1



“I had calculated that by advancing my a-pawn, I would win in a few moves (following is a look at what those few moves might be) but suddenly I saw that by castling (!!) Black could set up a counter-attack against f2. I therefore began to take energetic measures to prevent Black from castling...” So writes Tal, poking a bit of fun at himself – needless to say, according to the laws of chess, Black can't castle in this game, having already moved his king, something the World Champion had forgotten! Tal could have won with his intended 29 a5 ♖g7 30 a6 ♖f7 31 a7 ♞e4 32 ♜e1 ♞a8 33 ♞b3+ d5 34 ♜a6 ♖f6 35 ♜b6 ♜f8 (or 35...♞xa7 36 ♞xd5+ ♖g6 37 ♜b7 winning a piece) 36 ♞c2 ♖g7 37 ♞c7 ♖f5 38 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 39 ♜xe7+ ♖g6 (39...♖g8 loses to 40 ♞b8+ ♜f8 41 ♞e5) 40 ♜g7+ ♖h5 41 ♞h2+ ♖g4 42 f3 mate!

Now back to Misha's misadventure

Alekhine Alert!

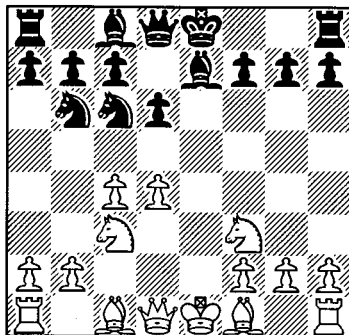
after his forgetful 29 ♖e1: 29...♗f4 30 a5 ♔g7 31 ♗b8+ (to “prevent” castling!) 31...♔f7 32 ♗b3+ e6 33 ♗b7 ♔e7 34 ♖e4 ♗d2 35 ♖ae1 ♔e5 36 a6 (way too late – Black didn’t castle, but he is nonetheless winning) 36...♗xb2 37 ♖b4 ♗a2 38 a7 ♔c3 39 ♖bb1 ♔xe1 40 ♖xe1 ♖f8 41 ♗b6 ♗d5 42 ♖c1 ♖c8 43 ♖xc8 ♔xc8 44 ♗c7+ ♔d7 45 f3 g4 46 ♔f2 gxf3 47 gxf3 e5 48 ♔g3 h5 49 ♗c1 h4+ 50 ♔xh4 ♗xf3 0-1 M.Tal-B.Larsen, Eersel (8th matchgame) 1969.

c) A modern version of this madness: 7 ♖c3 g6 8 h4 ♔g7 9 h5 e5 10 d5 ♖d4 11 hxg6 ♔g4 12 gxh7 ♗d7 13 ♔d3 0-0-0 14 ♔e3 ♖df8 15 ♔xd4 exd4 16 ♖e4 ♔xf3 17 gxf3 e6 18 dxe6 ♗xe6 19 ♗e2 d5 20 c5 dxe4 21 cxb6 ♗xb6 22 ♔xe4 d3 23 ♗xd3 ♖d8 24 ♗c4 ♗xb2 25 0-0 ♗f6 26 ♖fc1 c6 27 ♖ab1 ♖d7 28 ♗a4 ♔h6 29 ♖c4 ♗g5+ 30 ♔f1 ♗h5 31 ♖xc6+ ♔d8 32 ♖xh6 ♗xh6 33 ♗xa7 ♖hxh7 34 ♗b8+ ♔e7 35 ♔xh7 ♗h1+ 36 ♔e2 ♗xh7 37 ♗e5+ ♔d8 38 ♗b8+ ♔e7 39 ♗e5+ ♔d8 40 ♗a5+ ♔e8 41 ♗b5 ♔f8 42 ♖b4 ♗c2+ 43 ♔f1 ♗d1+ 44 ♔g2 ♖g7+ 45 ♖g4 ♖xg4+ 46 fxg4 ♗xg4+ 47 ♔f1 ♗d1+ ½-½ S.Kindermann-J.Fleck, German League 1982. One would have to be crazy to play this without full preparation – note how Black casually allowed a white passed pawn to sit on h7, one move from queening, for twenty one moves!!

6...exd6 7 ♖c3 ♔e7

I don’t recommend Larsen’s peculiar move order, but now that he’s back in good field position I think he should

play 7...♔g4 at once, transposing back to our repertoire.



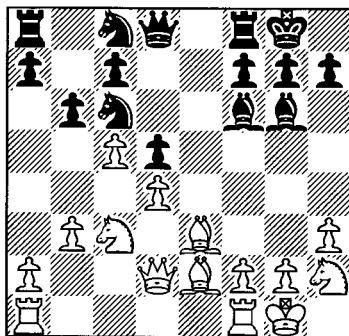
8 ♔e2 0-0 9 0-0 ♔g4 10 b3 ♔f6 11 ♔e3 d5 12 c5 ♖c8 13 h3

In the last game we saw the inoffensive 13 b4. Here Larsen faces what he considers to be strongest, and which is most popular in the database.

13...♔h5

13...♔xf3 14 ♔xf3 ♖8e7 is simpler, but Larsen has cleverly found squares for all his pieces and sees no need to exchange.

14 ♗d2 ♔g6 15 ♖h2 b6!



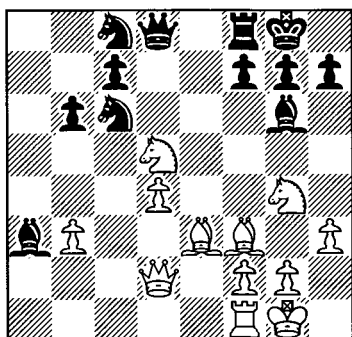
Another important counter-attack, quite in Larsen’s style. I noticed in my

book on Bird's Opening (where the bold Birdophile Bent was often featured) that Larsen loves to bring pawns toward the centre via exchange: note that here his a-pawn steps one square closer to the centre, while the a-file opens.

16 cxb6 axb6 17 ♖g4 ♙e7 18 ♙f3 ♙b4

Black pressures White across the board.

19 a3 ♖xa3 20 ♖xa3 ♙xa3 21 ♖xd5



Yes, White has gained a centre pawn for a wing pawn, but that's not the only feature of this exchange; White has also been left with two isolated pawns.

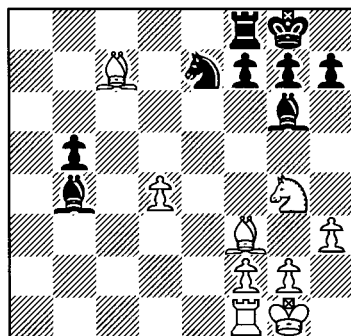
21...♗8e7 22 ♗xe7+ ♗xe7 23 b4

This leads to Black obtaining an outside passed pawn. Better is 23 ♖a1 ♙d6 24 ♗e5 ♗f5 25 ♙g5 ♙e7 26 ♙xe7 ♗xe7 27 g4 ♗h4 28 ♙c6 f6 29 ♗xg6 ♗xg6 30 ♖e1 ♗d6 and White's pawn weaknesses may be balanced by his control of the e-file. Notice there is nothing left at all of White's opening space advantage.

23...♗d6 24 ♙f4

24 b5 may be a slight improvement, but many variations like the following are similar to the game, where Black ends up with an outside passed pawn: 24...♙b4 25 ♗c1 ♙d3 26 ♖d1 ♙xb5 27 ♙f4 ♗d7 28 ♗xc7 ♗g6 29 ♖b1 ♙a5 30 ♙g3 ♖c8 31 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 32 ♗e3 b5 etc.

24...♗xb4 25 ♗xb4 ♙xb4 26 ♙xc7 b5



Black has a small endgame advantage due to the more distant passed pawn, and converts this into a win with excellent technique.

27 d5 ♗f5

The white d-pawn is blockaded, but Black's b-pawn is not.

28 ♗e5 ♖c8 29 ♙b6 ♙d6 30 ♗xg6 hxg6 31 g4 ♗h4 32 ♙e2 ♖c2!

Taking advantage of a tactic to get his rook to the seventh – now Black's advantage is clear.

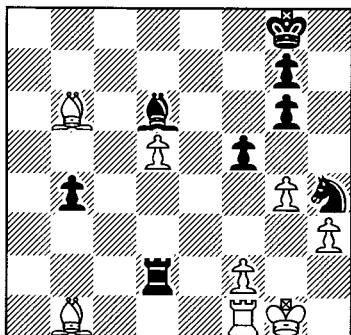
33 ♙d3

The pawn is poisoned, for if 33 ♙xb5 ♖b2 34 ♙d8 (forced) 44...♗f3+ 35 ♙g2 ♗d2 36 ♙d3 (again forced, as Black has a winning attack after 36 ♖d1 ♗e4; e.g. 37 ♙f1 ♖xf2+ 38 ♗h1 ♗g3+ 39 ♙g1 ♙c5, or 37 ♖e1 ♖xf2+ 38

Alekhine Alert!

♔g1 ♕h2+ 39 ♕h1 ♖g3 mate, or 38 ♕h1 ♖g3+ 39 ♕g1 ♕c5) 36...♖xf1 37 ♕xf1 ♕c5 38 ♕h4 g5 39 ♕g3 ♖d2 and Black should win the exchange up ending.

33...♖d2 34 ♕e4 f5 35 ♕b1 b4



The difference between the passed pawns is enormous.

36 ♖d8 ♖f3+ 37 ♕g2 fxg4 38 hxg4 ♖e5 39 ♕g5 ♖d4 40 f3 b3

Instead of the complicated 40...♖xg4, Black simply presses on with his passer!

41 ♕e4 b2 42 ♕b1 ♖c4 43 ♕c2

43 ♕f2 resists longer, but Black should win with 43...♕e5 as his pawn on the seventh, now protected by two minor pieces, is just too strong.

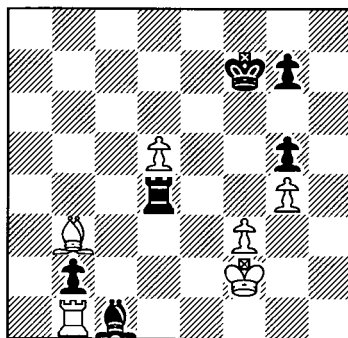
43...♕e7!

Diverting the bishop from d2; e.g. 44 ♕xe7 ♖d2+ 45 ♕g3 ♖xc2 46 ♕b4 ♖c1 and wins.

44 ♕b3 ♕xg5 45 ♕xc4 ♕c1!

The average person would win with 45...♖xc4 46 ♖xb2 ♖d4, but Bent has a spectacular zugzwang in mind.

46 ♕b3 g5 47 ♕f2 ♕f7 0-1



It transpires that White has no useful moves, while Black will bring his king to d6, sac the exchange on d5, and then win as in a king and pawn ending, since the white rook is helpless.

Here are some beautiful variations – from the days of slow time limits and adjournments. I always enjoy games like this, and fine analysis, but I look on them with a certain nostalgia – such endgame beauty will never be seen again: 48 ♕e2 (48 d6+ ♕e8 doesn't change anything) 48...♕e7 49 ♕f2 ♕d6 50 ♕e2 ♖xd5! 51 ♕xd5 (if White refuses, then 51 ♕e1 ♕c5 52 ♕e2 ♖d4 53 ♕e6 ♕b4 54 ♕f7 ♕c3 55 ♕g8 ♖d2+ 56 ♕e1 ♕d4 57 ♕h7 ♕e3 58 ♕e4 ♖f2 59 ♕b7 ♖xf3! and Black will even sac the ox on g4 if he has to – White will finally have to take or resign!) 51...♕xd5 52 ♕d3 ♕e5 53 ♕e2 (or 53 ♕c3 ♕f4 54 ♖xb2 ♕xb2+ 55 ♕xb2 ♕xf3 and now it really is a pawn ending – winning for Black!) 53...♕f4 54 ♕f2 g6!! (Bent's point: he has this key "pawn ending" tempo) 55 ♕g2 (either way is fatal; if 55 ♕e2 ♕g3 56 ♕e1 ♕xf3 57 ♕f1 ♕xg4

58 ♖g2 ♜f4 59 ♜f2 g4 60 ♖g2 g3 61 ♖g1 ♜f3 62 ♜f1 g2+ 63 ♖g1 g5! 64 ♜h2 ♜f2 65 ♜h3 g1R! 66 ♜h2 ♜g3 and mates) 55...♜e3 56 ♖g3 ♜d3 57 ♜xb2 (if 57 ♜f2 ♜c2 and White can't even get f3-f4 in) 57...♜xb2 58 f4 gxf4+ 59 ♜xf4 ♜c1+ 60 ♜e5 g5 61 ♜f5 ♜f4 62 ♜g6 ♜e3 and wins.

White did his own analysis and foresaw his beautiful death.

Game 42

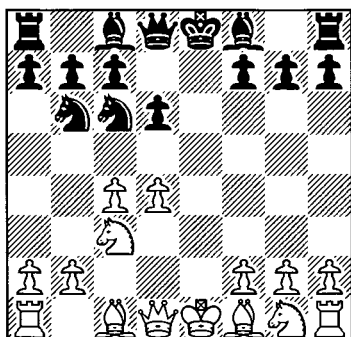
E.Popova-T.Taylor

Los Angeles (rapid) 2009

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 d4 d6 5 exd6 exd6

We've seen in the previous two games that if Black sets up in Larsen style, with the moves ...♘c6/...♜g4/...d6-d5, he gets good counter-chances and can play for a win in a complex position. But what happens if White cuts across this plan by playing d4-d5 first? This and the next game answer that question.

6 ♘c3 ♘c6



I was in the midst of writing this book when I played this game and had already thoroughly studied the ideas – so I follow my own recommendation to the letter! Note again that by this move order I avoid White's "solid machine" of ♘c3/♜d3/♘e2, as that development is now simply impossible since the d-pawn hangs.

7 ♜e2

The aggressive 7 d5 will be considered in the next game; 7 ♘f3 is of course met by 7...♜g4.

And after 7 ♜e3 (White still tries to get the machine set up but, as we will see, this is not possible) 7...♜e7 8 ♜d3 0-0 9 ♘ge2 ♘b4 catches the light-squared bishop with equality, for if 10 ♜b1 ♘c4 11 a3, then not 11...♘c6?? 12 ♜d3 winning a piece, but the simple 11...♘xe3! (Black has something to take!) 12 fxe3 ♘c6 and Black was just a pawn up in NN-T.Taylor, blitz game 2009.

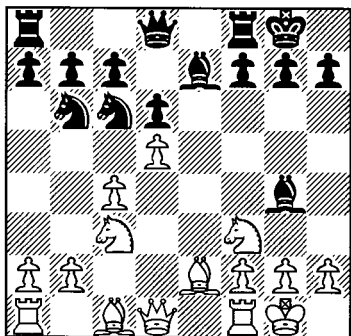
7...♜e7 8 ♘f3

White can prevent Black's next with 8 h3, but only at the cost of time: 8...0-0 9 ♘f3 ♜e8 (or 9...♜f5 10 0-0 ♜e8 11 a3 ♜f6 12 ♜e1 ♘a5 13 b3 c5 14 ♜e3 d5 15 cxd5 ♘xd5 16 ♘xd5 ♜xd5 17 dxc5 ♜xd1 18 ♜axd1 ♘xb3 19 ♜d3 and now, instead of retreating with 19...♜e6 as in J.Benjamin-A.Wohl, Sydney 1999, Black could play the simple 19...♜xd3 20 ♜xd3 ♘a5 with a slight edge in view of White's split pawns) 10 0-0 ♜f6 11 ♜f4 ♜f5 12 ♜e1 h6 13 ♜c1 ♜d7 14 c5 dxc5 15 dxc5 ♜xd1 16

Alekhine Alert!

♖xc7 ♜xc3 17 bxc3 (again the split white pawns are seen) 17...♙a4 18 ♙xc7 ♜xc3 19 ♖d2 ♜e4 20 ♖c2 ♖ac8 21 ♙h2 ♜xf2! and Black won a pawn and eventually the game in L.Cooper-A.Baburin, Bunratty 2006.

8...♙g4 9 0-0 0-0 10 d5



Now 10 ♙e3 ♙f6 11 b3 d5 transposes to the previous two Larsen games, so my opponent tries radically to prevent the coming ...d6-d5 – but while her pawn advance gains space, Black also gains the excellent e5-square for his knight.

10...♙xf3

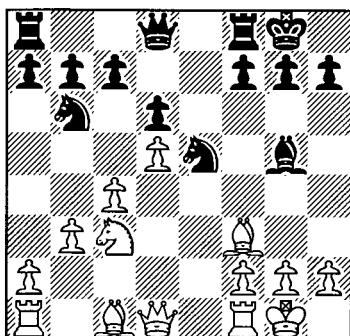
10...♜e5 is also possible, and with good squares for his pieces, Black has few problems: 11 ♜xe5 ♙xe2 12 ♖xe2 (the desperado likewise gets nowhere: 12 ♜xf7 ♙xd1 13 ♜xd8 ♖axd8 14 ♖xd1 ♜xc4 with equality) 12...dxe5 13 ♖xe5 ♜xc4 is equal. It's worth pointing out that such balanced positions are also quite interesting, and the better player might well win them – while the Voronezh sufferer must usually try to force a draw, as anything more is usu-

ally impossible in those positions.

11 ♙xf3 ♜e5 12 b3 a5

A sharp and active move in Larsen's style, though not the only possibility.

Vaganian's choice, 12...♙g5, is very simple, immediately easing the position through exchanges.



After 13 ♙b2 ♜xf3+ 14 ♖xf3 ♙f6 15 ♖ae1 ♜d7 16 ♜d1 ♖e8 17 ♙xf6 ♖xf6 18 ♖xf6 ♜xf6 19 ♜c3 a6 20 f3, I would assess the position as completely equal – but it's far from a dead draw. In a classic GM grind, Vaganian manages to put the pressure on and win this game: 20...♜d7 21 ♜f2 ♜e5 22 ♖e3 (I think 22 ♙g3!, staying away from knight forks, is White's best, and then after 22...♜d3 23 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 24 ♖d1, say, White has good chances to draw; outside of this slight inaccuracy it's pretty hard to find a real mistake on White's part) 22...f5 23 ♖d1 ♖e7 24 h3 ♖e8 25 ♖e2 g5 26 g3 ♜f7 27 ♖d4 ♜f6 28 ♖c2 h5 29 ♜e2 g4 30 fxg4 hxg4 31 h4 ♜f3 32 ♖d3 ♖e4 33 ♖b2 ♖e7 34 a4 a5 35 ♜c3 ♖e1 36 ♖e2 ♖7xe2+ 37 ♜xe2 ♖b1 38 ♜f4 ♖b2+ 39 ♜e3 ♜e1 40 ♖c3 ♜g2+ 41 ♜xg2

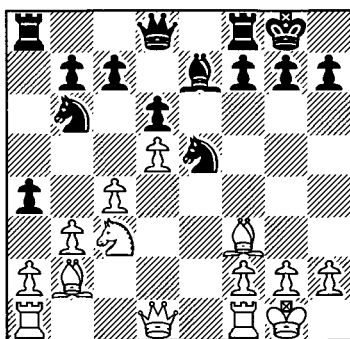
♖xg2 42 ♔d4 f4! 43 gxf4 ♕f5 44 c5 ♕xf4 45 cxd6 cxd6 46 ♖c7 ♜d2+ 47 ♕c3 ♜xd5 (Black picks off White's advanced centre pawn in true hypermodern fashion!) 48 ♜xb7 g3 49 ♜g7 ♕f3 50 b4 axb4+ 51 ♕xb4 ♜d4+ 52 ♕b5 g2 0-1 S.Belkhodja-R.Vaganian, FIDE World Ch., Moscow 2001.

13 ♖b2

13 ♖e3 ♜xf3+ 14 ♜xf3 ♜d7 is simple equality: White's slight space advantage means nothing with only two minor pieces on the board, and White's advanced pawns might be vulnerable later, as we saw in the Vaganian ending.

White could play 13 a4 to stop Black's pawn break, but after 13...♜xf3+ 14 ♜xf3 ♜d7 Black has good play with ideal squares for his minor pieces at c5 (knight) and f6 (bishop).

13...a4



Black has significant play on the queenside, and there is no risk even if White can sometime "win" a pawn with bxa4, as the white pawns will be too broken. Meanwhile Black always

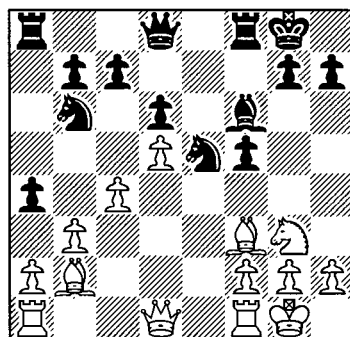
threatens a rook incursion (see the following note) if the a1-rook moves away.

14 ♜e4

If instead 14 ♖e2 ♜e8 15 ♜c2 g6 16 g3 (White's extra pawn is not felt after 16 ♜xa4 ♜xa4 17 bxa4 ♖f6 18 ♜ab1 b6, when Black can pressure many fixed targets) 16...♖f8 17 ♜e4 ♖g7 18 f4 ♜ed7 19 ♖xg7 ♕xg7 20 ♜c3+ ♕g8 21 ♖f3 f5 22 ♜g5 ♜f6 23 ♜xf6 ♜xf6 24 ♜e6 ♜e7 25 ♜ae1 axb3 26 axb3 ♜a3 with good queenside counterplay – note that White can't play 27 ♜e3 due to 27...♜xc4!, winning a pawn.

14...f5 15 ♜g3 ♖f6

It's amazing that after a few moves there is no clear way for White (!) to solve her problems.



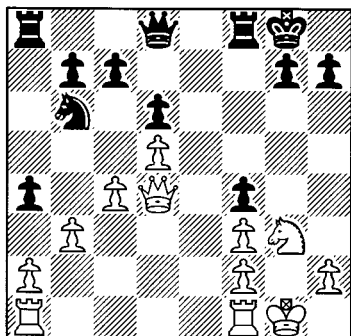
16 ♖d4

White offers doubled pawns, hoping to attack on the kingside, but it turns out only Black has an attack. On the other hand, 16 ♖c3 g6 is slightly better for Black in view of White's bad knight; while after 16 ♖e2 f4 17 ♜h5 f3 18 ♜xf6+ ♜xf6 19 ♖d3 (not 19 ♖xf3?

Alekhine Alert!

♖xf3+ 20 ♜xf3 ♜xb2 and Black wins a piece) 19...fxg2 Black is clearly better in view of White's shattered kingside.

16...♖xf3+ 17 gxf3 ♙xd4 18 ♜xd4 f4!



I secure a powerful outpost for my knight on e5, which can no longer be driven away by any white pawn – Black is clearly better and we haven't reached move 20 yet!

19 ♖e4 ♘d7 20 ♙h1 ♖e5 21 ♘d2 ♜h4 22 b4 ♜f5 23 ♜g1 ♜af8 24 c5

Another possibility is 24 ♜g2 ♜h5 25 ♜ag1 g6 26 ♜a7 ♜h3 27 ♜xa4 ♖xf3 28 ♖xf3 ♜xf3 29 ♜d1 ♜xd1 30 ♜xd1 f3 31 ♜g3 ♜e5, but Black's advantage persists in the ending; the dark side of White's bold 10 d5 is seen as Black's pieces use the e5-square.

24...♜f6 25 ♜g2

Or 25 cxd6 ♜xd6 and d5 is weak.

25...♜h6 26 ♜ag1 g6 27 ♜c3

After 27 cxd6 ♜fh5 28 dxc7 ♜xh2+! forces mate.

27...♜fh5

Black brings every piece to the attack!

28 ♖f1 ♜h3 29 cxd6

Since f3 is indefensible (29 ♖d2 ♜xh2+! and mates again), White must put her faith in her advanced pawns – but Black's attack cannot be stopped!

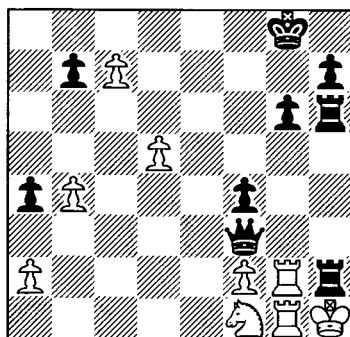
29...♖xf3 30 ♜xf3

30 dxc7 ♜xh2+ 31 ♖xh2 ♜xh2+ 32 ♜xh2 ♜xh2 is a slightly fancier mate.

30...♜xf3 31 dxc7

White is one move away from queening with check, but I have an Alekhine-style mating combination – in the end it's both rooks, not the queen, that is sacrificed on h2!

31...♜xh2+!



32 ♖xh2 ♜xh2+ 0-1

In view of 33 ♖xh2 ♜h5 mate.

This is probably my best game to date with Alekhine's Defence.

If Black knows the ideas of the Exchange Variation with 5...exd6 (and can memorize 6 moves – as opposed to 33!) then one can calmly play for a win in Larsen style. White's game is not so easy, especially when one sees the Vaganian game in the notes, where White reached "equality" but could not convert that into "draw".

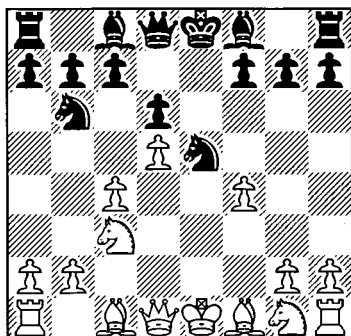
Game 43

R.Prasca Sosa-A.Baburin
Turin Olympiad 2006

**1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 d4 d6 5
 exd6 exd6 6 ♘c3**

For 6 ♘f3, planning to castle queen-side and attack, see the next game. Note that if White wants to play this attack he has to play it now, as after 6 ♘c3 my recommended 6...♘c6 prevents ♘f3.

6...♘c6 7 d5 ♘e5 8 f4



Unless White plays this move quickly, the early d4-d5 has no independent significance, and will trans- pose to something similar to the previ- ous game, where Black had no prob- lems.

Now Black, facing a serious cramp, has to counter accurately. In general, Black needs to get a minor piece off, and must be careful, as in the note to move 8, that he does not allow a White attack.

8...♘ed7

Best: the knight can re-emerge on c5 or f6.

I don't recommend 8...♘g6 as White won't go for the pawn with ♘d4 but will continue as follows, keeping a space advantage, while the black knight on g6 has little scope: 9 ♘d3 ♘h4?! (this manoeuvre fails, as nothing is exchanged and the black pieces get in each other's way) 10 g3 ♘f5 (the wandering knight ends up on f5, block- ing the c8-bishop) 11 ♘f3 g6 12 0-0 ♘e7 13 a4 a5 14 ♘d2 0-0 15 g4 ♘h4 16 ♘xh4 ♘xh4 17 f5 ♘g5 18 ♘e4 ♘xd2 19 ♘xd2 (by the time Black has made some exchanges, White has a winning attack!) 19...♘h4 20 ♖f4 g5 21 ♘f6+ ♘h8 22 ♗e4 ♘d7 23 ♘c3 ♘e5 24 ♗xe5! dxe5 25 ♘xe5 and White converted easily in A.Giaccio-F.Tabak, Ostende 2002.

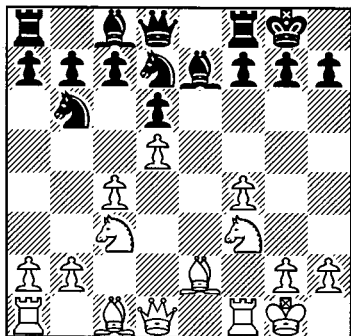
9 ♘f3

White went on a pawn-snatching expedition in the following game – and barely drew: 9 ♘d4 ♘e7! 10 ♘xg7 ♘f6 11 ♘g4 ♘xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♘f6 13 ♘d2 ♘c5 14 ♘g5 ♘xg5 15 fxg5 ♘f5 16 0-0-0 ♘d3+ 17 ♘xd3 ♘xd3 18 c5 ♘xd5 (Black has regained his pawn with a good game, but doesn't seem to have enough to win) 19 cxd6 cxd6 20 ♘h3 ♗c8 21 ♘f4 ♘xf4 22 ♘xf4 ♗xc3+ 23 ♖b2 ♗c2+ 24 ♖b3 ♗f2 25 ♘xd3 ♘xf4 ½-½ Art.Minasian-Ara.Minasian, Arme- nian Ch., Yerevan 1999.

9...♘e7 10 ♘e2 0-0 11 0-0

Black's main goal in this variation is to exchange one pair of minor pieces

(two is even better) to nullify White's space advantage (or more accurately, turn it into a liability, as advanced pawns without pieces to support them can become weak).



This position should be easy for Black: it looks like a King's Indian Four Pawns Attack gone horribly wrong, as one of the centre pawns is missing and the line of the remaining three is crooked, giving Black squares for his pieces.

Nonetheless, in the game White gets good chances – or could have obtained good chances, had he sacrificed (and not lost!) a pawn. The reason this happened was that the Grandmaster played too slowly over the next few moves.

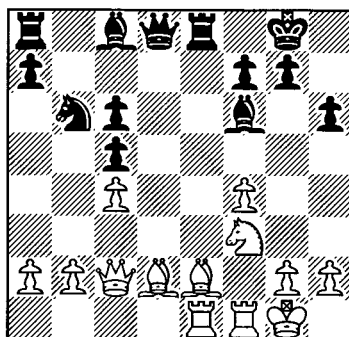
In fact, Black is already at least equal or better: he just needs to take over the open spaces behind White's pawns. Best now is 11...♟f6, seizing the unobstructed long diagonal, and if 12 ♞e4 then 12...♞c5!, forcing exchanges. White has no completely satisfactory answer, for if 13 ♞xf6+ ♟xf6 and Black

will own the centre with moves like ...♟f5 and ...♞e8; or if White takes the other piece then 13 ♞xc5 dxc5 14 ♞e5 ♞d7 and he can't keep the long diagonal closed, while the hole at d4 is permanent.

11...♞e8 12 ♟c2 h6

This is way too "careful", and now White completes his development.

13 ♟d2 ♟f6 14 ♞ae1 c6 15 dxc6 bxc6 16 ♞e4 ♞c5 17 ♞xc5 dxc5



18 ♟d3?

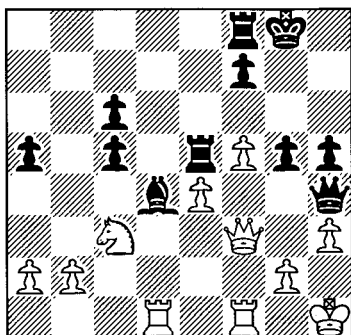
Just when the first player has chances for advantage with a bold sacrifice – he overlooks a trick and loses a pawn. Correct is 18 ♞e5! ♟e6 (or 18...♟xe5 19 fxe5 ♞xe5 20 ♟c3 with wonderful two bishop compensation for the pawn, while the knight on b6 is shut out of the game, and Black's doubled pawns are weak) 19 b3 (again the black knight is blocked) 19...♟d4+ 20 ♞f2 ♟xe5 21 fxe5 ♟xe5 22 ♟c3 ♟g5 23 ♟d3 with the two bishops and a terrific attack for the pawn – I would definitely rather be White here.

18...♞xe1 19 ♞xe1 ♟xb2!

This is what White missed: the queen is overloaded.

20 ♖e4 ♜f6 21 ♜e5 ♖d4+

When I saw this position I suddenly had a Fischer flashback! Check out this instructive win, especially the position and pawn structure after Black's 25th move: 1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♜c3 ♖g7 4 e4 d6 5 ♜f3 0-0 6 ♖e2 e5 7 d5 ♜bd7 8 0-0 ♜c5 9 ♜c2 a5 10 ♖g5 h6 11 ♖e3 ♜g4 12 ♖xc5 dxc5 13 h3 ♜f6 14 ♜xe5 ♜xd5 15 cxd5 ♖xe5 16 f4 ♖d4+ 17 ♜h1 ♜h4 18 ♜d3 c6 19 ♜f3 h5 20 f5 ♖d7 21 ♖c4 g5 22 ♖ad1 ♖ae8 23 dxc6 ♖xc6 24 ♖d5 ♖e5 25 ♖xc6 bxc6



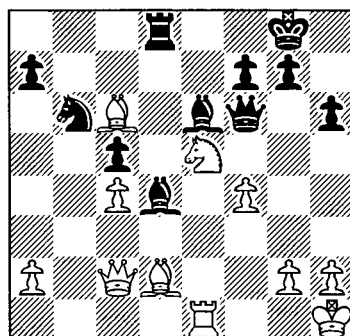
(Black has complete control of the centre and a dominating bishop – the doubled isolated pawns keep the white knight out of the game, and are not felt as a weakness) 26 ♖d3 ♖fe8 27 ♜g3 ♜xg3 28 ♖xg3 f6 29 ♖d3 h4 30 b3 ♖b8 31 g3 hxg3 32 ♖g2 ♖b4 33 ♖c1 ♜f7 34 ♜xg3 ♜e7 35 ♖e1 ♜d6 36 ♖h1 ♖e7 37 h4 ♖h7 38 h5 ♖h6 39 ♜f3 ♜e5 40 ♜e2 a4 41 ♜g3 c4 42 bxc4 ♖b2 43 ♜f1 ♖xh5 44 ♖xh5 ♖f2+ 45 ♜g3 ♖xf1 46 ♖h8 ♜xe4 47 ♖a3 ♖g1+ 48 ♜h2 ♖c1 49

♖xa4 ♖c2+ 50 ♜h1 c5 51 ♖a3 ♜xf5 52 ♖h2 ♖c1+ 53 ♜g2 g4 54 ♖h1 ♖c2+ 55 ♜f1 ♜g5 56 ♖h8 f5 57 ♖g8+ ♜h4 58 ♜e1 f4 59 ♜d1 ♖g2 60 ♖a6 f3 61 ♖h6+ ♜g3 62 ♖hg6 ♜f4 63 a4 ♖g1+ 64 ♜d2 f2 65 ♖f8+ ♜g3 0-1 S.Gligoric-R.J.Fischer, Siegen Olympiad 1970.

22 ♜h1 ♖e6 23 ♖xc6

23 ♜xc6 is better, so as to get rid of Black's monster bishop on d4.

23...♖d8



Now White's advanced pawns (c4 and f4) are both weak, and soon Black picks up material as the Alekhine counter-attack begins.

24 ♖f3 ♖xe5 25 fxe5

If 25 ♖xe5? ♜xc4 wins.

25...♜h4 26 ♖a5 ♖d4 27 ♖e4 ♖xe4 28 ♜xe4 ♜f2?!

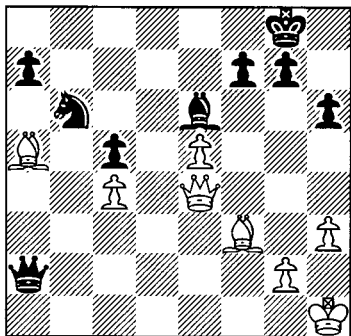
Over elaborate: 28...♜xe4 29 ♖xe4 ♜xc4 with an extra pawn is much simpler and stronger.

29 h3?

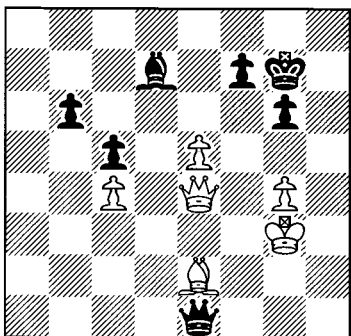
White should play 29 ♖e2.

29...♜xa2

Black is a good pawn up and patiently grinds to victory, GM style.



30 ♖xb6 axb6 31 ♖e2 g6 32 ♖h2 ♜b2
33 ♖g3 ♖g7 34 ♖f3 ♖f5 35 ♜e3 h5 36
g4 hxg4+ 37 hxg4 ♖e6 38 ♜f4 ♖g8 39
♜e3 ♖g7 40 ♜f4 ♜c3+ 41 ♖g2 ♖g8 42
♖f2 ♖f8 43 ♜e4 ♜d2 44 ♜a8+ ♖g7 45
♜e4 ♖h6 46 ♖g3 ♖g7 47 ♖f2 ♖d7 48
♖g3 ♖f8 49 ♖f3 ♖e6 50 ♖e2 ♖g7 51
♖f2 ♖d7 52 ♖g3 ♜e1+



53 ♖f3?

53 ♖h3 is better, though after 53...♜f2 Black will win in the long run; note the possibility of a king march to g5, targeting the white g-pawn. With three weak pawns White is doomed eventually, but after the played 53 ♖f3, “eventually” becomes just one move!

53...♖c6! 0-1

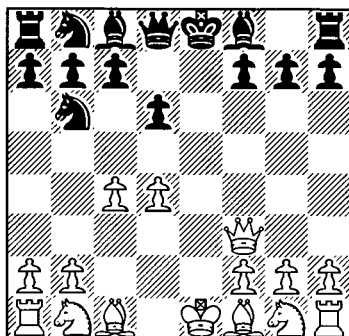
White’s early aggression didn’t amount to much, though when Black played inaccurately, White could have come back strongly with a pawn sacrifice. However, the reader sees that Black should have no problems with this variation, if he immediately seizes the lines behind White’s prematurely pushed pawns.

Game 44

R.Denda-W.Kripp

Bad Bertrich 2005

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♖b6 5
exd6 exd6 6 ♜f3



It’s hard to believe this early queen attack can worry Black – and it doesn’t! White plans queenside castling and a kingside attack, but such ideas are far too naive, and Black counters easily.

6...♖c6

Black’s typical response, made even stronger by the fact that d4 is unprotected.

7 ♖e3 ♜e7!?

As Alekhine has said, sometimes the best way to meet an eccentricity in the opening is to come back with one of your own – here Black's clumsy queen comes with direct tactical threats that stop White's plan.

Of course it's also possible to let White have his fun, then counter-attack, as in the following much analyzed game. If you like this sort of thing, go for it! 7...♙e7 8 ♘c3 0-0 9 0-0-0 ♙e6 10 b3 (10 d5 doesn't win anything in view of 10...♙e5) 10...a5 11 c5 ♘d7 12 ♙b5 ♘b4 13 ♘ge2 c6 14 ♙d3 a4 15 ♘xa4 b5 16 cxb6 ♘xa2+ 17 ♙b2 ♘xb6 18 ♘xb6 ♜xb6 19 d5 ♜a5 20 dxe6 ♜a3+ 21 ♙c2 ♘b4+ 22 ♙d2 ♘xd3 23 ♙xd3 ♜xb3+ (White gets an extra piece *and* a centralized king!) 24 ♘c3 ♙f6 25 exf7+ ♙h8 26 ♙d4 ♙xd4 27 ♙xd4 d5 28 ♙a1 ♜c4+ 29 ♙e5 (now that's a bold king!) 29...♙ad8 30 ♙h1 d4 31 ♘a4 ♜b4 32 ♘c5 d3 33 ♜e4 ♜b2+ 34 ♙f4 ♜xf2+ 35 ♙g5 h6+ 36 ♙h5 ♙d5+ 37 ♙g4 ♙g5+ 38 ♙h3 ♙h5+ 39 ♙g4 ♙h4 (yet mate comes even to the bold) 0-1 H.Hagesaether-A.Wohl, Ubeda 2000.

8 ♙e2

White is already struggling to equalize: 8 d5 ♘d4 9 ♜d1 ♘f5 and 8 ♘c3 ♘xd4 both give Black the advantage due to the pin.

8...♘b4!

A primitive but strong move, which shows another drawback of the white queen on f3, not holding c2.

9 ♘a3

We've seen, over and over, that the white knight is awkward here, and the black knight becomes hard to drive away. If Black can play ...♘b4 successfully in the Alekhine, by all means do!

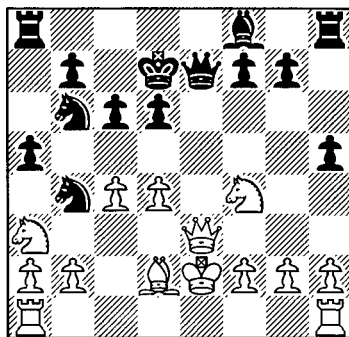
9...c6 10 ♘h3 h5

White can't castle queenside and has to be unhappy about the failure of his opening idea, though his position would not be so bad if he continued with 11 ♜g3.

11 ♙d2 a5

The knight likes its spot in White's territory and refuses to leave!

12 ♘f4 ♙g4 13 ♜e3 ♙xe2 14 ♙xe2 ♙d7



15 ♜xe7+

15 ♙he1 g5 16 ♘h3 ♙e8 17 ♙f1 ♜xe3 18 ♙e3 g4 19 ♘f4 ♙g7 is probably more advantageous for Black than it first looks, as the a1-rook still can't enter the game since it's tied to the a-pawn.

15...♙xe7 16 h4?! ♙f6

As usual, White's advanced pawns come to be weaknesses in the Alekhine endgame. Here Black's bishop aims at

two – h4 and d4 (of course the former should not have advanced at all!).

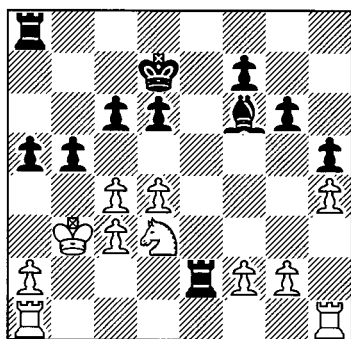
17 ♖c3 g6 18 ♜d3 ♜a4 19 ♚d2

If 19 ♜xb4 axb4 20 ♖xb4 ♜xb2 with a clear plus for Black.

19...♞he8 20 ♜c2

The bad knight on a3 continues to be a problem: White finally exchanges it, but lets the black rook get to the seventh rank.

20...♜xc2 21 ♚xc2 ♞e2+ 22 ♚b3 ♜xc3 23 bxc3 b5



Black has targets across the board; it's highly unlikely any human could draw this with White.

24 cxb5 cxb5 25 a3 ♞ae8 26 ♞ad1 ♚c6 27 d5+ ♚b6 28 a4 ♞c8 29 ♞c1 ♞d2

29...♖xc3 works right away.

30 ♞h3 ♖xc3!

He sees it! Black wins a clear pawn, for if 31 ♞xc3 bxa4+.

31 axb5 ♚xb5 32 ♞b1 ♖b4 33 ♜xb4 axb4 34 ♞e1

34 ♞b2 avoids mate, but after 34...♞xd5 Black just takes an overextended pawn with a typical Alekhine ending crush.

34...♞a8 0-1

Mate is inevitable.

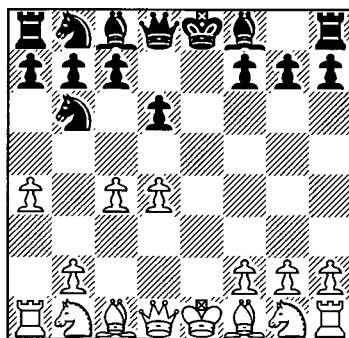
White's 6 ♞f3 doesn't do much: Black can easily meet it as here, or even allow White's plan and then counter-attack against the rather airy white king.

Game 45

A.Leonenko-O.Sorochan

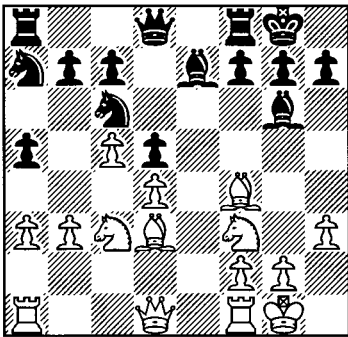
Ukrainian Junior
Championship, Kiev 2000

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♜b6 5 exd6 exd6 6 a4



I became very interested in this rarely-played move when I discovered that, while there were only four games with it in the database, White won them all! How could such a non-developing move be so powerful? I found out it's probably not all that powerful, but Black does need to play well, as we will see in the main game (with the other three losses referred to in the notes).

But before we get to all that, there is another non-developing move, 6 h3, that is sometimes played here. Usually this will transpose to 6 ♖c3 ♖c6 7 ♙e2 ♙e7 8 h3 covered in the notes to Game 42; but here's another example, where White tries to suppress all of Black's play ...and fails miserably! Let's take a look: 6 h3 ♖c6 (my all purpose move) 7 ♜f3 ♙f5 8 a3 (White tries to prevent everything, but Black gets board-wide Alekhine play anyway!) 8...a5 9 b3 (White has five pawns out and one piece!) 9...♙e7 10 ♙d3 ♙g6 11 ♖c3 d5 (the typical break) 12 c5 ♖c8 13 0-0 0-0 14 ♙f4 ♜8a7



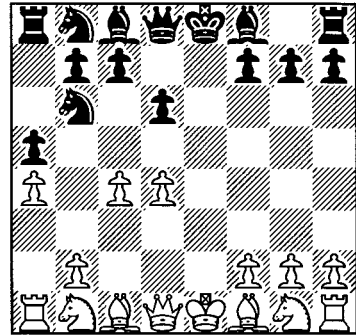
Black finds a knight outpost (!) and breaks on the queenside! 15 ♙e1 ♙f6 16 ♙xg6 hxg6 17 ♙d2 b6 18 cxb6 cxb6 19 ♙e2 b5 20 ♖a2 ♙b6 21 ♙d1 ♙fe8 22 ♖e5 ♙ad8 23 ♙d3 ♙xe5 24 dx5 ♙e6 25 ♙d2 d4 26 ♙b2 ♙d5 27 ♙ed2 ♖c8 28 ♖c1 ♖8e7 29 g4 g5! (now the king-side!) 30 ♙g3 ♖g6 31 ♖d3 ♙b7 32 ♙a1 ♖gx5 33 ♖x5 ♙dx5! 34 ♙x5 ♖xe5 (the Alekhine knight comes in with a fatal attack) 35 ♙e2 ♖f3+ 36 ♙f1 ♖d2+

37 ♖e1 ♖xb3 38 ♙xe6 ♖xa1 39 ♙e8+ ♖h7 (Black's knight cannot be killed; White must resign) 0-1 D.Svidinsky-A.Gnidenko, St Petersburg 2006.

The moral of this story is that White can't smother an Alekhine player who has the true counter-attacking spirit!

Now back to the main game, where White has just played 6 a4, looking at a hundred percent score in the database...

6...a5



Best: Black stops the pawn advance and secures a good outpost square in White's territory, namely b4.

The idea of White's last is obviously to play a4-a5, push the black knight back, and gain a space advantage across the entire queenside – clearly it's not good to allow this as we will see in the game below, where Black gets so cramped he loses a piece in the middle of the board!

6...g6 7 a5 ♖6d7 8 ♖f3 ♙g7 9 ♙e2 0-0 10 0-0 ♖c6 11 ♖c3 ♖f6 12 d5 ♖e7 13 ♙e1 ♖f5 14 ♙d3 ♖g4 15 ♙g5 ♙f6 16 ♙xf6 ♙xf6 17 ♙xf5 ♙xf5 18 ♙d4

Alekhine Alert!

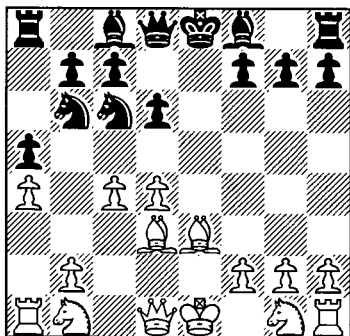
♞xd4 19 ♜xd4 ♙d3 (19...♙d7 is preferable, but White is still clearly better, with the a-pawn leading the charge: 20 a6 b6 21 ♜cb5 ♞fc8 22 ♞e7 ♜e5 23 f4 ♜f8 24 ♞xd7 ♜xd7 25 ♜c6 ♜c5 26 ♞a3 ♜g7 27 ♜cxa7 ♞f8 28 b4 ♜e4 29 ♜c6 ♞fc8 30 a7 with a tremendous bind for the exchange, or just 22 f4!? and White has a space grind without complications) 20 b3 f5 21 ♞ed1 (decisive) 21...♙xc4 (21...♙e4 loses to 22 f3) 22 bxc4 ♜e5 23 ♜e6 ♞fe8 24 ♜xc7 ♜xc4 25 ♜xa8 ♞xa8 26 ♞e1 ♞c8 27 f4 b6 28 axb6 axb6 29 ♞e7 ♜a5 30 ♜a4 ♜c4 31 ♞b7 1-0 F.Barroso Martinez-R.Stout, correspondence 1999.

So the a-pawn must be stopped!

7 ♜c3

The other two games break away here – let's see why Black loses:

a) 7 ♙d3 ♜c6 8 ♙e3



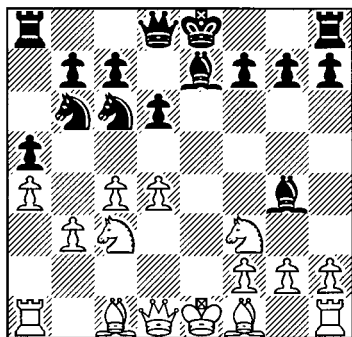
8...♞e7?! (Black goes off the rails; while this move worked in the previous game, with the white queen misplaced on f3, here it's just too extravagant – as the reader should know by now, 8...♜b4 is correct, catching the light-

squared bishop with equality, as 9 ♙e2 allows 9...♙f5 with advantage) 9 ♙e2 ♙f5 10 ♜c3 ♜b4 11 ♞c1 0-0-0 (and now Black “justifies” his early queen development by castling into an attack!) 12 ♜f3 ♙g4 13 b3 c5 14 0-0 g6 15 ♞e1 ♙g7 16 ♜b5 h6 17 ♞d2 ♞f8 18 h3 ♙xf3 19 ♙xf3 f5 20 g3 g5 21 ♞ed1 ♞g8 22 dxc5 ♜xc4 (desperation, in view of 22...dxc5 23 ♜d6+ ♜b8 24 ♙xc5 ♙e5 25 ♙xb4 axb4 26 c5 with a winning attack) 23 bxc4 f4 24 ♙g4+ ♜b8 25 cxd6 fxe3 26 ♞xe3 ♜c6 27 ♞b6 ♙f6 28 ♙f3 1-0 S.Svonavec-D.Siroky, Slovakian Ch., Trencianske Teplice 2005.

b) 7 b3 (this looks inoffensive but White wins in 20 moves – how did that happen?) 7...♙e7 8 ♜f3 ♙f5? (off the track: the queen's bishop can go to f5 when combined with a knight raid to b4 that forces ♜a3, or when White has wasted time with h2-h3 – but neither of these applies here; instead Black should equalize with 8...♙g4 and ...♜c6 following Larsen) 9 ♙d3 ♙xd3 10 ♞xd3 0-0 11 0-0 ♙f6 12 ♞a2 ♜c6 13 ♞e2 ♞d7 (13...d5 is necessary, counter-attacking and holding e4 – one sees that Black's play is too passive, not at all in Larsen or Alekhine style) 14 ♜c3 ♞fe8 15 ♜e4 ♞f5 16 ♞fe1 ♜f8 (better is 16...♞f8 17 d5 ♜b4 18 ♞d2 ♜d7 19 ♙a3 which only loses a pawn) 17 ♜xd6! (this pretty tactical blow abruptly ends the game) 17...♞d7 18 ♞xe8+ ♞xe8 19 ♞xe8+ ♞xe8 20 ♜xe8 ♜xe8 1-0 S.Hedenström-E.Näckholm, Skelleftea 1999.

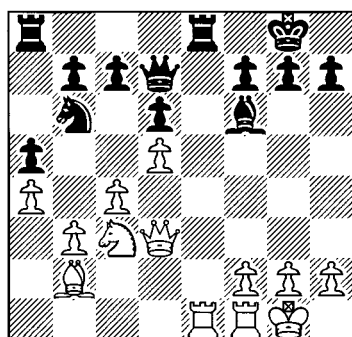
Black failed to put pressure on d4 (no ...g4) and then failed to equalize in the centre (no ...d6-d5) and that was too much!

7...c6 8 b3 e7 9 f3 g4



In this game Black has continued correctly with my recommended development and has fully equalized already, dead equal on the Fritz-ometer. Yet Black loses! Where does he go wrong?

10 e2 0-0 11 0-0 e8 12 d5 xf3 13 xf3 e5 14 e2 ed7 15 b2 f6 16 c2 c5 17 ae1 d7 18 d3 xd3 19 xd3



19...e7

Black has done everything right so far: he has exchanged two minor pieces and contested the e-file – and should have no problems. And yet here he makes a slight mistake, which very very slowly leads to the loss of the game. Correct is to continue simplifying with 19...xe1 20 xe1 e8 21 d2 h6 22 e2 (alternatives are no better: if 22 e4? xb2 23 xb2 f5 and Black wins; White can't avoid the exchange of bishops either, since after 22 c1 g5 23 f4? xf4! 24 xe8+ xe8 25 xf4 e1+ 26 f1 xc3 Black emerges a pawn ahead, or if 23 d1 xe1+ 24 xe1 xc1 25 xc1 e7 26 b5 c6 with good play for Black) 22...xb2 23 xb2 e7 24 d2 d7 25 f1 c5 26 d4 xe1+ 27 xe1 xe1+ 28 xe1 and the knight ending should be drawn; e.g. 28...f8 29 e2 g6 30 e3 e7 31 f4 f5 with dead equality.

20 e1!

Here's the difference: in all the above lines Black exchanged bishop for bishop (I feel like I'm back writing my Budapest Gambit book, where that was a key idea) and *not* bishop for knight. With his last move, White avoids the bishop/bishop exchange and soon ends up in a bishop vs. knight ending, creating a tiny pull that he squeezes all the way to victory in 93 moves!!

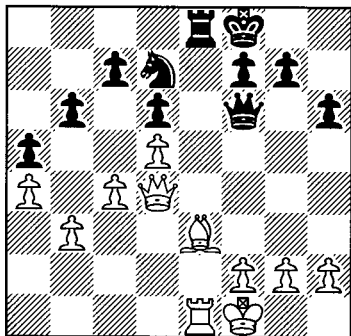
20...ae8 21 e4 f5 22 xf6+ xf6

Now a long plus equals grind sets in. Yes, Black should draw this, but it's not easy, which just shows how difficult a game chess is – Black played a

Alekhine Alert!

perfect opening and early middlegame, then after one slip must struggle for hours; and even if he succeeds in that struggle, he will only get half a point!

23 ♖e3 ♜xe3 24 ♙xe3 ♘d7 25 ♜d2 b6
26 ♖e1 h6 27 ♙f1 ♙f8 28 ♜d4



28...♜g6

I think Black should go in for the king and pawn ending, despite the doubled pawns, as I don't see any way for White to break through after 28...♜xd4 29 ♙xd4 ♜xe1+ 30 ♙xe1 ♘c5 31 ♙xc5 dxc5.

29 ♜c3 ♜g4 30 h3 ♜g6 31 ♖e2 ♜e4 32 ♜c2 ♜e5 33 ♜b2 ♜h2

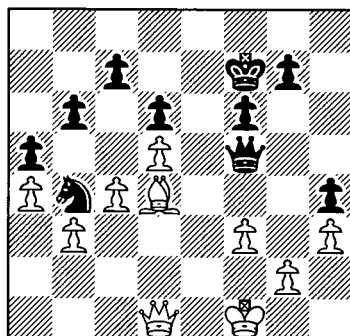
33...♜xb2 34 ♜xb2 ♘e5 looks like an easier draw – the exchange of queens is probably inevitable in the long run, so Black should try to do it under favourable circumstances. Instead, by avoiding the exchange, he gives White more and more chances.

34 f3 ♘f6 35 ♙g1

35 ♜xf6!? is an amazing tactical shot, but it looks like Black comes out okay after 35...gxh6 36 ♙xh6+ ♙g8 37 ♜xe8+ ♙h7 38 ♙e3 ♜g3 39 ♖e4 f5 40

♜e7 ♜g7 41 ♜xc7 ♜a1+.

35...♜xe2 36 ♜xe2 ♜f4 37 ♙e3 ♜f5 38 ♜d1 h5 39 ♙e2 ♜e5 40 ♜d4 ♜g3 41 ♙f1 ♜g6 42 ♜d1 ♘d7 43 ♙f2 ♘e5 44 ♙d4 ♘d3+ 45 ♙e3 ♘b4 46 ♙f2 ♜f5 47 ♙e2 f6 48 ♙f2 h4 49 ♙e2 ♙f7 50 ♙f1



50...♜d3+ 51 ♜xd3 ♘xd3 52 ♙e3 ♙g6

Still avoiding exchanges – 52...♘c5 looks drawn; but could Black have been playing for a win?

53 ♙e2 ♘e5 54 ♙f2 ♙h5 55 ♙e1 g5 56 ♙c3 ♙g6 57 ♙e3 ♙f5 58 ♙e1 ♘d7 59 b4!

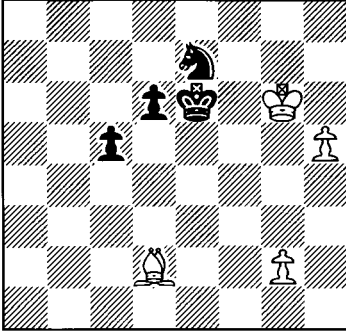
The bishop comes into its own, as White exchanges pawns, giving his cleric more room to manoeuvre – and Black's ...♘c5 will no longer target b3.

59...axb4 60 ♙xb4 ♘c5 61 a5 bxa5 62 ♙xa5 ♘a6 63 ♙c3 ♙g6

Now White is clearly better with bishop vs. knight, play on both sides, and target pawns all over – and so grinds to victory.

64 ♙d4 ♘b8 65 f4 ♙f5 66 fxg5 fxg5 67 ♙c3 ♘a6 68 ♙f3 ♘c5 69 ♙d2 ♘b3 70 ♙c3 ♘c5 71 ♙e3 ♘a6 72 ♙d4 ♘b4 73 ♙b2 ♘a6 74 ♙c1 ♘c5 75 ♙d2 ♘b3 76

♙e1 ♘c5 77 ♙a5 ♘a6 78 ♙f3 ♙e5 79
♙g4 ♙d4 80 ♙xg5 ♙xc4 81 ♙xh4 ♙xd5
82 ♙g5 c5 83 h4 ♙e6 84 ♙g6 ♘b4 85
h5 ♘d5 86 ♙d2 ♘e7+



87 ♙g5?!

Not quite a perfect grind: White should win with 87 ♙g7!, as after the played move Black might escape with 87...d5! – but Black is too exhausted to see this counter-chance.

87...♙f7 88 g4 d5 89 ♙f4 ♘c6 90 g5 c4

**91 g6+ ♙g7 92 ♙g5 d4 93 h6+ ♙g8 94
♙f6 c3 95 h7+ ♙h8 96 ♙h6! 1-0**

Mate is inevitable: a classic bishop vs. helpless knight finale.

Generally speaking, we see that 6 a4 is not a threat to the Alekhine's defence, but good endgame skills are always required!

Summary

The Exchange Variation is one of those “nothing” lines that poses no threat to the Alekhine, but is having a vogue now due to the stubbornness of the “we must take back toward the centre” brigade, who are memorizing as fast as they can and still losing!

But if you play like Larsen (5...exd6!) and add a little bit of Taylor accuracy (usually that means 6...♘c6), you will have every chance to equalize quickly and then play for a win.

Chapter Six

The Four Pawns Attack – Fracture Him!

Our Hero: Vladimir Sergeev

The Four Pawns Attack is a direct attempt to refute Alekhine's Defence, so one must be prepared. That massive pawn centre could lead to a quick mating attack!

On the other hand, the general feeling is that this particular attack is more show than bite (statistically White only scores 50%) and, as mentioned in the Introduction, I only faced it once in the eleven recent tournament games where I played the Alekhine. Although I've played the Alekhine off and on throughout my career, the last Four Pawns Attack I can recall before that was when I beat Bill Atkinson with Black in the money round of a Philadelphia tournament, circa 1975! In fact, just to get a little more experience with the line, I set up a training game (see

note to Game 51) to make up for my lack of tournament experience.

So don't expect to get this too often!

But you do need to be prepared, and my recommendation is to follow this chapter's hero, the Ukrainian GM Vladimir Sergeev, and play 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 c4 ♜b6 4 d4 d6 5 f4 g6!.

But there are other moves...

Lines I Don't Like

Game 46
A.Grischuk-P.Svidler
Odessa (rapid) 2009

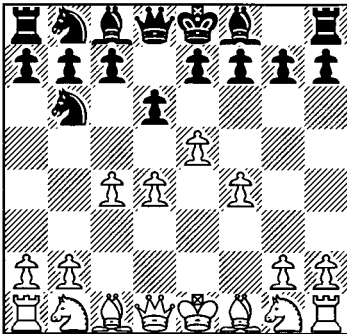
1 e4 ♖f6

This high-level game attracted my attention when I saw that an

Alekhine's Defence was featured in Joel Benjamin's "Game of the Week" on ICC. GM Benjamin makes an interesting comment in his introduction to the game, when he says that in the Modern Line after 4 ♖f3 "White gets the advantage no matter what Black plays" which is true as far as it goes, but how far does it go? Yes, I agree that if White plays in solid, positional Anand style, he gets a plus – as White gets in many openings – but how big is this plus? As we've seen in Chapters Three and Four, if Black in turn plays circumspectly and accurately, that plus may only amount to a few percentage points on *Fritz*, and should be well within a human drawing range.

But note again the virtually unanimous agreement that the Modern Line is the key test of the Alekhine; the Four Pawns Attack may be a good surprise weapon, but shouldn't do much of anything if Black is prepared.

2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4



This is the basic position of the Four Pawns Attack. White has a large advan-

tage in space and would have an almost perfect position if his e-pawn were on e4 rather than e5, when he would have two level duos controlling the whole centre. This is one reason why I think the Four Pawns Attack vs. the King's Indian is much stronger than this version: King's Indian players have to suffer against those double duos and must work very hard to break up the smooth line of White's pawns – here White's impetuous advance on move 2 already broke the line ("Not before the bloody others, not after the bloody others, but *with* the bloody others!" as Michael Caine would say).

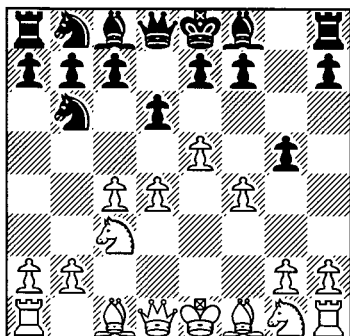
In our position Black's d-pawn already has something to bite on, and that raises the possibility of ...c7-c5, blowing up White's whole centre.

As I see it, White's weaknesses (e5, d4) are on the long dark diagonal, so it's natural and best to fianchetto the dark-squared bishop with 5...g6, planning ...♗g7 and an eventual ...c7-c5, resulting in the aforementioned central demolition – this is the essential nature of Sergeev's system.

Nevertheless, Black has tried other plans, none of which I like too much: the most popular is seen in the main game, and I also give the back of the hand to some alternatives noted below.

P.Bücker-T.Kebbekus, Detmold 1983, features the interesting but overly risky 5...g5, when Black sets about undermining with no thought to his own kingside! This is advocated and played

by the German correspondence master Michael Schirmer, but I think the king-side weaknesses are too significant if White simply develops with 6 ♖c3! and then:



a) 6...gxf4 (as in Bücker-Kebbekus) 7 ♖xf4 dxe5 8 ♗xe5 ♜g8 9 d5 (White is already much better after only simple moves: White controls the centre and Black's kingside is full of self-inflicted holes) 9...c6 10 ♘f3 ♗g4 11 ♗d3 e6 12 0-0 ♗c5+ 13 ♖h1 cxd5 14 cxd5 ♘8d7 15 ♗g3 e5 16 ♗xh7 ♜h8 17 ♜d3 ♗xf3 18 ♜xf3 ♜e7 19 ♜xf7! (it's all over) 19...♜g5 (no acceptance is possible: 19...♜xf7 20 ♗g6 or 19...♗xf7 20 ♜g6+ ♗f8 21 ♜f1+ and wins) 20 ♘e4 ♜h6 21 ♜af1 ♗d4 22 ♘f6+! ♘xf6 (again the rook is immune: 22...♗xf7 23 ♘g8+ ♗g7 24 ♘h6 wins the queen) 23 ♜1xf6 ♜c1+ 24 ♜f1 ♜c5 25 ♗h4 ♜d6 26 ♜g6 ♜xg6 27 ♗xg6 ♜xh4 28 ♜g7+ 1-0, since 28...♗d8 29 ♜f8 is mate.

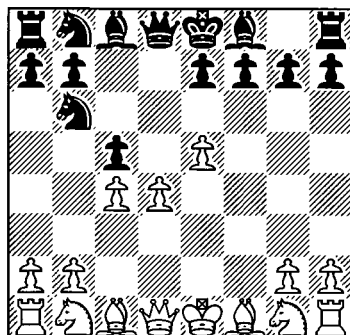
b) 6...e6 (as played by Schirmer himself) 7 ♘e4 (7 exd6 cxd6 8 fxg5 looks like a good plus pawn to me, but the game continuation is fine) 7...dxe5 8

fxe5 ♗e7 9 ♗e3 and Black had a terrible position, even though the variation's high priest finally won in F.Ammann-M.Schirmer, correspondence 1992.

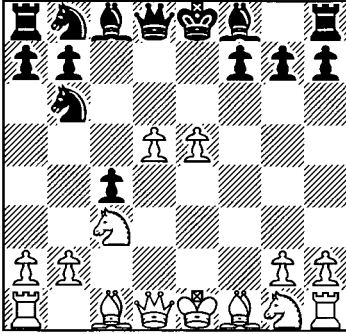
c) 6...♗g7 7 ♘f3 gxf4 8 ♗xf4 ♗g4 and now 9 c5!, forcing Black back, is correct (instead of 9 ♗e2, after which White lost his way and the game in D.Winter-R.Polzin, Goch 1995), when I see nothing good for the Schirmerite; e.g. 9...dxe5 10 dxe5 ♘6d7 11 h3 ♗h5 (or 11...♗xe5 12 ♗xe5 ♗xf3 13 ♜xf3 ♘xe5 14 ♜xb7 ♘bc6 15 ♗b5 0-0 16 ♜d1 ♜b8 17 ♜a6 ♜c8 18 ♜c8 ♜fc8 19 ♗c6 ♘c6 20 b3 and White can grind, Voronezh style, with his queenside majority and superior pawn structure) 12 g4 ♗g6 13 ♜a4 0-0 14 0-0-0 ♜e8 15 ♜d4 e6 16 ♗b5 c6 17 ♗c4 ♜e7 18 ♘e4 ♗xe4 19 ♜xe4 ♘xc5 20 ♜c2 f6 21 exf6 ♜xf6 22 ♗e3 and White will at least win his pawn back with attack.

5...dxe5 6 fxe5 ♘c6

A.Kislinsky-V.Shpagin, Kharkov 2009, showcases the plan of 6...c5 followed by ...e7-e6.

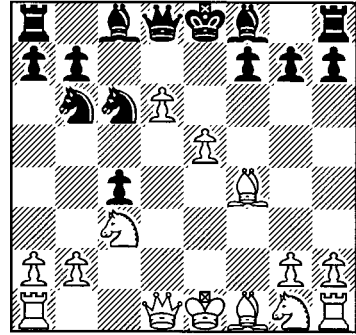


Black opens up the a3-f8 diagonal for his king's bishop but gives White, at least for the moment, complete central control – risky at best! 7 d5 e6 8 ♖c3 exd5 9 cxd5 (I like the mobile pawn centre ...for White!) 9...c4



10 d6 (slamming shut the bishop's diagonal that Black has just opened cuts straight across his idea; White has other options here of course: if you don't know the following famous and much analyzed game, you should take a look – it's a classic example of how a big centre can be translated into a kingside attack – watch how Bronstein sacs all his pieces and dances with his king, confident that his attack will prevail in the end – and it does: 10 ♖f3 ♗g4 11 ♗d4 ♗xf3 12 gxf3 ♗b4 13 ♗xc4 0-0 14 ♗g1 g6 15 ♗g5 ♗c7 16 ♗b3 ♗c5 17 ♗f4 ♗xg1 18 d6 ♗c8 19 ♗e2 ♗c5 20 ♖e4 ♖d8d7 21 ♖c1 ♗c6 22 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 23 ♖f6+ ♗h8 24 ♗h4 ♗b5+ 25 ♗e3 h5 26 ♖xh5 ♗xb3+ 27 axb3 ♖d5+ 28 ♖d4 ♖e6+ 29 ♖xd5 ♖xg5 30 ♖f6+ ♗g7 31 ♗xg5 ♖fd8 32 e6 fxe6+ 33 ♖xe6 ♖f8 34 d7 a5 35 ♖g4 ♖a6+ 36

♗e5 ♖f5+ 37 ♗xf5 gxf5 38 d8 ♗fxg4 39 ♗d7+ ♗h6 40 ♗xb7 ♖g6 41 f4 1-0 D.Bronstein-L.Ljubojevic, Petropolis Interzonal 1973) 10...♖c6 11 ♗f4.

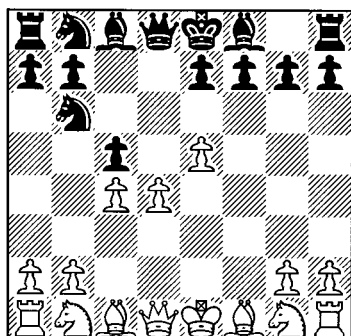


Black's problem is that his king's bishop is blocked out of the action: radical solutions have been tried without great success – one recalls from the Introduction that GM Luther made a draw with a queen sacrifice in a similar position, but some other players have not been so lucky: 11...g5 12 ♖e4 gxf4 13 ♖f6+ ♗xf6 (there it is – I wish I could recommend it, but I can't) 14 exf6 ♗e6 15 ♗h5 ♗xd6 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 ♖f3 (or 17 ♖e2 ♖hg8 18 h3 ♗e5 19 ♖c3 ♗xc3 20 ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 21 bxc3 ♖g3 22 ♖d2 ♖a4 23 ♗e2 ♖xc3 24 ♗f3 ♖xa2 25 ♖b1 c3+ 26 ♖d3 ♗c8 27 ♗b5 ♗d5 28 ♗xb7+ ♖d8 29 ♗a8+ ♗c7 30 ♖b7+ ♖d6 31 ♗f8+ ♗e5 32 ♖b5 ♖xf3+ 33 gxf3 a5 34 ♗e7+ ♖xe7 35 fxe7 ♖f6 36 e8 ♗c4+ 37 ♖xc4 c2 38 ♗e5+ 1-0 M.Narciso Dublan-A.Torrecillas Martinez, Barcelona 1996) 17...♖hg8 18 ♖g5 ♖g6 19 ♖xe6 fxe6 20 f7 ♖f6 21 ♗xh7 ♗e7 22 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 23 ♗e4 c3 24 bxc3

♟d7 25 ♙e2 ♟c5 26 ♖c4 ♟xf7 27 ♗b5
 ♟d7 28 h4 ♙a3+ 29 ♟c2 ♟d6 30 ♗b3
 ♙c5 31 ♙g4 ♖g6 32 ♙f3 ♟b6 33 h5
 ♗h6 34 ♗h4 ♙e3 35 ♖g4 ♟dc4 36 ♗b4
 ♗h8 37 ♗e7 1-0 A.Zude-S.Bücker, West
 German Ch., Bad Neuenahr 1987. There
 just doesn't seem to be enough for the
 queen here, as long as White keeps his
 head.

Now back to Kislinsky-Shpagin
 where Black tries less radical methods –
 but doesn't find time to make a 20th
 move! 11...♙e6 12 ♟f3 ♗d7 13 ♙e2
 0-0-0 14 ♗d2 f6 15 exf6 ♙xd6 (only
 now does Black develop the king's
 bishop, but it's already too late) 16
 0-0-0 ♙xf4 17 ♗xf4 ♗f7 18 ♟g5 ♗xf6
 19 ♗xf6 gxf6 20 ♟xe6 1-0 as White has
 won a piece. I love sharp play, but to
 me this line is beyond risky!

The high-powered game S.Movse-
 sian-E.Francsics, Czech Team Champi-
 onship 2005, features a similar plan, in
 that Black plays 6...c5,



but then follows with 7...g6. I don't
 approve, for the white centre is no
 longer kept under Nimzowitschian re-

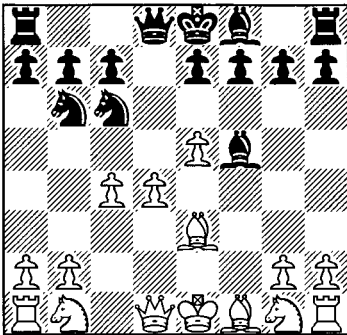
straint and can easily move forward.
 Also, because of the early exchange on
 e5, White's dark-squared bishop has an
 open diagonal and a good post at f4:
 6...c5 7 d5 g6 8 ♙f4 ♙g7 9 ♟c3 0-0 10
 ♗d2 e6 11 0-0-0 exd5 12 cxd5 ♙g4 13
 ♗e1 c4 14 h3 ♙f5 15 g4 (since retreat-
 ing just gives White full central control
 and an easy development, Black tries to
 mix it up with a pawn sacrifice – but he
 fails to solve the problem of the white
 centre pawns) 15...♙d3!? 16 ♙xd3 cxd3
 17 ♗xd3 (Black is trying to attack, a
 pawn down, while giving up the whole
 centre; there may be some tactical jus-
 tification, but my feeling is I'd love to
 have White – even though Black con-
 jures up some play, White is never
 worse and finally scores the full point)
 17...♟a6 18 d6 ♖c8 19 ♟b1 ♟b4 20
 ♗d1 ♟c4 21 ♗h2 ♗a5 22 ♟f3 ♖c5 23
 ♗he2 h6 24 ♟d4 ♟d5 25 ♟e4 ♟xf4 26
 ♟b3 ♗b4 27 ♟exc5 ♟xe2 28 ♖xe2
 ♟xe5 29 ♗d5 b6 30 ♟d3 ♟xd3 31
 ♗xd3 ♖d8 32 d7 (now that's a far ad-
 vanced centre pawn!) 32...♗a4 33 ♖d2
 ♗c6 34 ♟c1 a5 35 ♟e2 ♟f8 36 ♖d1
 ♙e5 37 ♗e3 ♗b5? (Black has to play
 37...♙g7 and try to hang on) 38 ♟c3!
 (Black can't eliminate the d-pawn with
 38...♙xc3 39 ♗xc3 ♖xd7, as after 40
 ♗h8+ ♟e7 41 ♖e1+ ♟d6 42 ♗b8+ ♟c6
 43 ♖c1+ ♟d5 44 ♖d1+ White wins at
 least a rook) 38...♗c5 39 ♗xh6+ ♙g7 40
 ♗d2 (now White is just a very big pawn
 up!) 40...♗c6 41 ♗d3 ♙f6 42 ♟e4 ♖xd7
 43 ♗xd7 ♗xe4+ 44 ♗d3 ♗g2 45 ♖d2
 ♗h1+ 46 ♖d1 ♗g2 47 ♗b3 a4 48 ♗xb6

♔g7 49 a3 ♖xh3 50 ♖b4 ♗g2 51 ♜c1 ♗e2 52 ♔a2 g5 53 ♜c5 ♔g6 54 ♜a5 ♙xb2 55 ♖xb2 ♗e6+ 56 ♔a1 1-0 (56...♗e1+ is rather harshly met by 57 ♖b1 check!).

I would hate to face that passed pawn for hours!

Now back to the ancient “main line”:

7 ♙e3 ♙f5

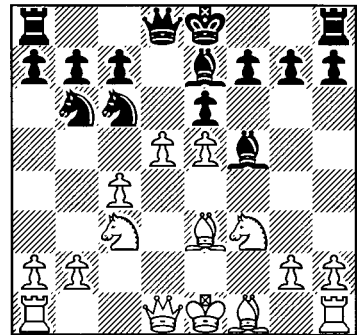


This system of defence was played in the earliest Four Pawns Attack game I can find, the following 1921 encounter featuring a future world champion, who would take up the defence himself (see Game 4). For the contemporary player, fighting the battle of the database, this means one very deep swamp: 88 years of theory!

Here is the historic game: 8 ♙f3 e6 9 ♙d3 ♙xd3 10 ♖xd3 ♗d7 11 ♙bd2 ♙b4 12 ♗e4 ♗c6 13 ♖xc6+ ♙xc6 14 0-0 ♙b4 15 ♜ac1 ♙xd2 16 ♙xd2 ♜d8 17 ♜f4 ♙e7 18 b3 ♙d7 19 ♙e4 0-0 20 ♜cf1 c5 21 ♙d6 cxd4 22 ♙xd4 ♙c6 23 ♙xb7 ♜b8 24 ♙c5 ♙xd4 25 ♙xd7 ♙e2+ 26 ♔h1 ♙xf4 27 ♙xb8 ♜d8 28 ♙c6 ♜d2 29

♙xa7 ♜xa2 30 ♜d1 g5 31 ♙c6 ♜xg2 32 ♜g1 ♜xg1+ 33 ♙xg1 ♙f8 34 ♙f2 ♙e8 35 ♙f3 ♙d7 36 ♙d4 ♙d3 37 ♙e4 ♙f2+ 38 ♙f3 ♙d3 39 ♙e4 ♙f2+ 40 ♙f3 ♙d3 41 ♙g4 ♙xe5+ 42 ♙xg5 f5 43 c5 h6+ 44 ♙xh6 ♙g4+ 45 ♙g5 ♙xh2 46 b4 ♙g4 47 b5 ♙e5 48 b6 ♙c4 49 ♙xe6 ♙xb6 ½-½ M.Euwe-B.Kostic, The Hague 1921.

8 ♙c3 e6 9 ♙f3 ♙e7 10 d5



The most popular and sharpest line – White scores a healthy 61% after this move (recall that in the Four Pawns Attack as a whole, White only scores 50%) which is recommended and extensively analyzed in *An Opening Repertoire for the Attacking Player* by Raymond Keene and David Levy. Black is put under tremendous pressure right away, and must walk a chess and memory tightrope to survive. If you defend this with Black, you also have to be prepared for White’s quiet alternative, 10 ♙e2.

10...exd5

The game that inspired Keene and Levy was the following beautiful at-

tacking crush: 10...♖b4 11 ♖c1 f6 12 a3 ♖a6 13 g4!? ♕xg4 14 ♖g1 f5 15 h3 ♕xf3 16 ♖xf3 0-0 17 ♖c2 ♗d7 18 ♖d2 ♖ae8 19 d6 cxd6 20 ♖h5 ♖c8 21 c5 ♖xc5 22 ♕xc5 ♖xc5 23 ♖dg2 g5 24 ♕b5 ♗d8 25 b4 ♖cd7 26 exd6 ♕f6 27 ♖e2 ♖e5 28 ♖f4 ♗xd6? 29 ♖xg5+ ♖h8 30 ♖xh7+ (a lovely exclamation point!) 1-0 D.Velimirovic-A.Gipslis, Havana 1971.

11 cxd5 ♖b4 12 ♖d4 ♕d7

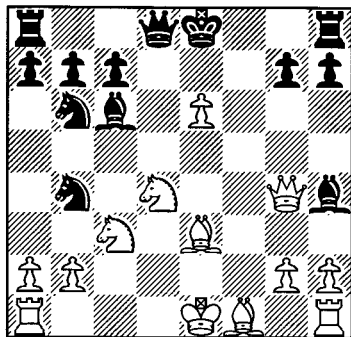
Not 12...♕g6, as 13 ♕b5+ forces the black king to move.

13 e6

If Black wants to play this line, he has to be prepared too for the following dangerous option, as played by a rising young Cuban GM: 13 ♖f3 c5 14 dxc6 bxc6 15 ♕e2 0-0 16 0-0 ♖d4d5 17 ♕f2 ♖c7 18 ♕g3 ♖xc3 19 bxc3 ♖c8 20 ♕d3 g6 21 ♕e4 ♕g4 22 ♖f2 ♖d5 23 c4 ♖c3 24 ♖xc6 ♖xe4 25 ♖xe7+ ♖g7 26 ♖f4 ♖c5+ 27 ♖f2 ♕f5 28 ♕h4 f6 29 ♖xf5+ gxf5 30 ♖xf5 ♖xe5 31 ♖xe5 fxe5 32 ♖e2 ♖f4 33 g3 ♖c3 34 ♖xe5 ♖xc4 35 ♖f1 ♖xa2 36 ♖e7+ ♖g8 37 ♖ff7 ♖g4 38 ♕f6 ♖g6 39 ♖g7+ ♖xg7 40 ♖xg7+ ♖f8 41 ♖xh7 ♖e8 42 ♖xa7 ♖e2 43 ♖b7 ♖c1 44 ♖b2 ♖f7 45 ♕h8 ♖e8 46 ♖f2+ ♖g6 47 ♕b2 ♖d3 48 ♖d2 ♖e3 49 ♕d4 ♖f3 50 ♕f2 ♖e5 51 ♖g2 ♖f7 52 h3 ♖h7 53 g4 1-0 L.Dominguez-O.Almeida Quintana, Cuban Ch., Santa Clara 2005.

13...fxe6 14 dxe6 ♕c6 15 ♖g4 ♕h4+

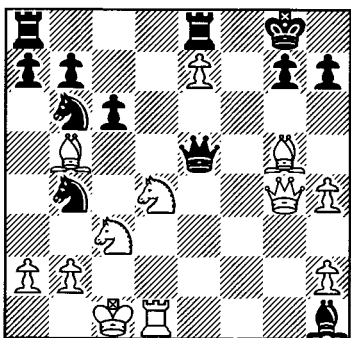
This is all theory, but is not a move you'd likely spot right away – Black gains material compensation for his severely threatened position.



16 g3 0-0 17 0-0-0 ♕xh1 18 gxh4

Benjamin calls this a “tabiya” for the variation. Can one believe this crazy, seemingly utterly irrational position can be a basic tabiya? There are indeed *thirty-three* games with it in the *MegaBase*!

18...♖f6 19 ♕b5 c6 20 ♕g5 ♖e5 21 e7 ♖fe8



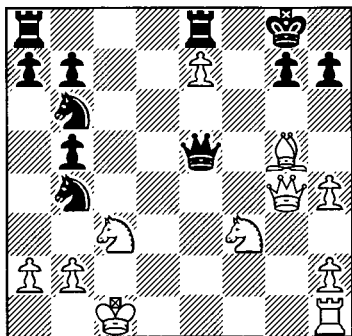
22 ♖xh1?

At this point Grischuk’s memory apparently failed him: correct is the previously played 22 ♖f5! h5! (if 22...cxb5? 23 ♖h6+! wins) 23 ♖xb4 cxb5 24 ♖d6 ♕c6 25 ♖b3+ ♖c4 26 ♖xc4 bxc4 27 ♖xc4+ ♖h7 28 ♖f7 ♖ac8 29 ♖xh5+ ♖g8 30

♖g4 ♜c7 31 ♙f4 ♜xe7 32 ♙xc7 ♜xc7 33 ♖g3 ♜f7 34 a3 1/2-1/2 V.Dimitrov-S.Videki, Wiesbaden 1990. Black's strong bishop certainly compensates for White's extra doubled pawn.

22...cxb5 23 ♖f3

23 ♖f5 is too late now: 23...♞d3+ 24 ♙c2 ♖f2 wins.



23...♞d3+?

And now Svidler's memory fails him! The previously played 23...♜c5 (G.Keschitz-J.Dovzik, Budapest 1990) is supposed to be Black's winning move, as White can't meet the two threats of ...♞xa2+ and ...♞d3+.

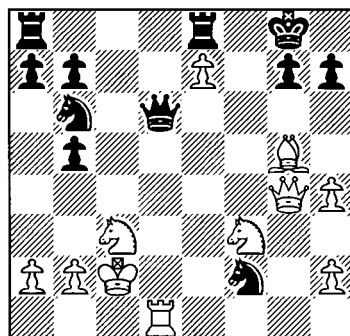
24 ♙c2?

This exposes the king too much. 24 ♙b1 is correct, and Fritz claims equality after 24...♜d6 25 ♞xb5, which is great because the position looks inhuman to me!

24...♜d6 25 ♞d1

White can't recover from the bad king position; e.g. 25 ♞xb5 ♞b4+ 26 ♙b3 ♜d5+ 27 ♙xb4 a5+ 28 ♙a3 ♜c5+ with a winning attack.

25...♞f2



Now the position clarifies to Black's advantage.

26 ♞xd6 ♞xg4 27 ♞d4 ♞f6 28 h5 ♜xe7 29 h6 ♞d7 30 ♙xf6 gxf6 31 ♞g4+ ♙f7 32 ♞xb5 ♜c8+ 33 ♞c3 ♞g8 34 ♞f4 ♞d5 0-1

Let me recap: Both GMs remembered 21 moves of absurd-looking theory, reaching a chaotic position. Then White remembered wrong or misplayed with 22 ♞xh1?, and Black remembered wrong or misplayed with 23...♞d3+?, and then the game was over after the next move (essentially the first new move) when White went to the wrong square with his king and was immediately lost!! Is this chess?? I think not!

As in my recommended Larsen line from the previous chapter, I want the Alekhine player to be able to have a little fun and win the game due to his own efforts, rather than just follow memorization/computer lines – which, as we see, Grandmasters can't remember either!

The following game, though a King's Indian Defence, features the

Alekhine Alert!

same pawn structure and Black king-side fianchetto as in the coming main games – essentially, Fischer's play and notes to this game (from *My Sixty Memorable Games*) provide the positional justification for the Sergeev line I will be recommending.

Game 47

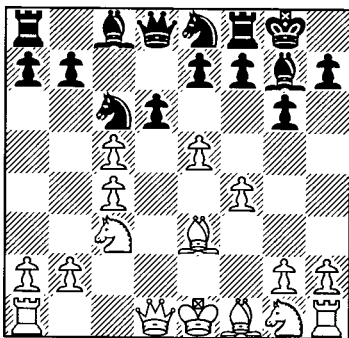
R.Letelier Martner -R.J.Fischer
Leipzig Olympiad 1960

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♙g7 4 e4 0-0 5 e5

"Weak" is Fischer's one word sentence of death for this move.

Notice how White gets the identical pawn structure to the Alekhine Defence, while Black's king's knight saves one move but goes to a worse square (e8 instead of b6). But Fischer's general strategy is a clear beacon of how to play such a position. Nibble with ...d7-d6, break with ...c7-c5, and don't count the pawns!

5...♙e8 6 f4 d6 7 ♙e3 c5! 8 dxc5 ♘c6!



The key idea, which we will see in later games of this chapter: Black sacrifices to smash White's centre.

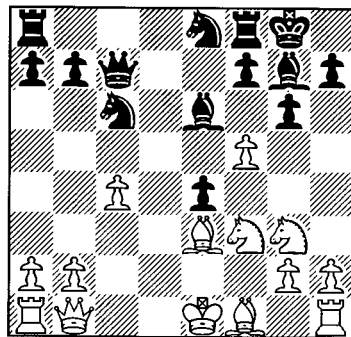
9 cxd6 exd6 10 ♘e4 ♙f5 11 ♘g3

White's only chance is to keep taking and hope for the best: after 11 ♘xd6 ♘xd6 12 ♙xd6 ♙xd6 13 exd6 ♙xb2 14 ♖d1 ♗ad8 (probably stronger than Fischer's recommended 14...♘b4) 15 ♙f2 ♙a3 16 c5 ♗fe8 17 ♙c4 ♗xe3 18 ♙xe3 ♙xc5+ 19 ♙f3 ♘d4+ 20 ♙g3 ♙c2 21 ♗d2 ♗xd6 Black has a pawn and an excellent position for the exchange – I'd say roughly equal.

11...♙e6 12 ♘f3 ♙c7

Fritz's number one is 12...dxe5 here, and it gives Black a clear advantage, but "I wanted to fracture him in the middle game!" says Fischer.

13 ♙b1 dxe5 14 f5 e4!



15 fxe6 exf3 16 gxf3 f5 17 f4 ♘f6

Returning with a vengeance!

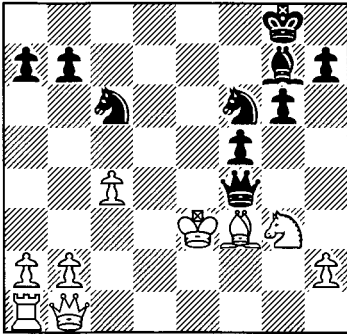
18 ♙e2 ♗fe8 19 ♙f2

If 19 0-0, Black plays 19...♗xe6 20 ♙c5 b6 21 ♙a3 ♘d4 22 ♙f3 (22 ♙d3 ♙c6 also wins for Black) 22...♘xf3+ 23 ♗xf3 ♘g4 with a decisive attack.

19...♖xe6

White's centre pawns have perished, and his king will follow them shortly. It's amusing that White can't even get counterplay with 20 c5, as Black can ignore the "threat" – 20...♖ae8! 21 ♖c4 ♘g4+ 22 ♖f3 ♘e3 wins.

20 ♖e1 ♖ae8 21 ♖f3 ♖xe3! 22 ♖xe3 ♖xe3 23 ♖xe3 ♖xf4+!! 0-1



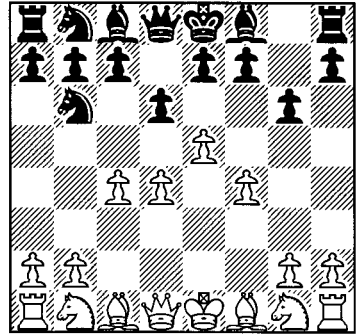
It's mate or Black gets two pieces for the rook and a decisive attack: 24 ♖xf4 (both 24 ♖e2 ♘d4+ and 24 ♖f2 ♘g4+ 25 ♖g2 ♘e3+ 26 ♖f2 ♘d4 are easy wins for Black) 24...♙h6 mate!

A brilliant win by Fischer, but the lasting value of the game is the strategic plan that informs Black's play, and can be used in Alekhine's Defence. As we'll see in the next few games, Sergeev has definitely done his homework!

Game 48 J.Bauer-V.Sergeev Sala 1993

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5

f4 g6



Sergeev's line: our hero has scored five wins and two draws – with Black of course – against high-ranking opposition. But also give credit where it's due: the first player to dare this fianchetto was the great innovator Richard Réti. Here's a very modern-looking game from 1925! 6 ♖e3 dxe5 7 fxe5 ♙g7 8 ♘d2 c5 9 dxc5 ♘6d7 10 e6 fxe6 11 ♖c2 ♘c6 12 ♘g3 ♖a5 13 ♖e2 ♘xc5 14 0-0 e5 15 ♘h4 ♘d4 16 ♙xd4 exd4 17 ♖ad1 ♖b6 18 b4 d3 19 ♙xd3 ♘xd3+ 20 c5 ♖xb4 21 ♘b3 ♘b2 22 ♘xg6 ♘xd1 23 ♘xh8 ♙xh8 24 ♖xd1 ♙g4 25 ♖d5 ♖d8 26 ♖f7+ ♘d7 27 c6+ bxc6 28 h3 ♖e6 29 ♖xh7 ♙d5 30 ♖f5+ ♘c7 31 ♖c1 ♖b6+ 32 ♘h1 ♖e3 looks like master of the chessboard to me! (0-1 K.Opocensky-R.Réti, Marienbad 1925).

6 ♘f3

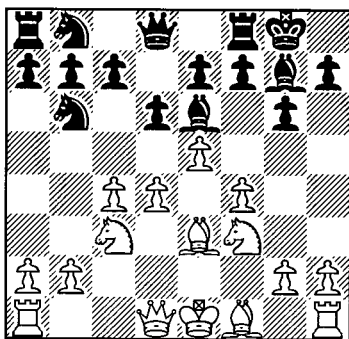
This and the following two games feature straightforward development by White, but as one sees, this does not challenge Black too much. The last two games of the chapter (Games 51 and 52) deal with the lines that are consid-

ered most dangerous, where White develops his queenside first (usually ♖c3 and ♕e3, avoiding 0-0 as he wants to have the option of h2-h4) and prepares either a direct kingside or central attack.

6...♗g7 7 ♖c3 0-0 8 ♕e3

8 h4 doesn't make sense now in view of 8...♗g4. If White wants the h2-h4 attack, he should develop first with ♖c3 and ♕e3 as stated above.

8...♘e6



The bishop might also go to g4, often after an exchange of pawns on e5 – see the next game for this idea.

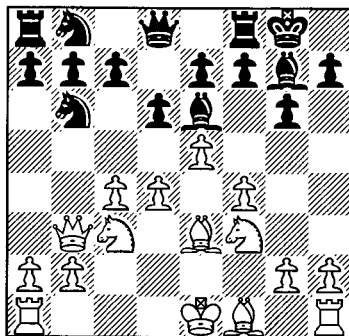
9 d5

Instead:

a) 9 b3 scores terribly for White, due to the Fischeresque tactical blow 9...c5! 10 dxc5 (10 d5 is seen by transposition in Game 51, note with 8 b3) 10...♖d6 11 cxd6 (instead 11 ♖c1 dxe5 ½-½ (!) was A.Fedorov-V.Sergeev, Warsaw rapid 2004, but that looks like a courtesy draw to the higher rated player – if he had that position again I'm sure Sergeev would play on) 11...exd6 12 ♗xd6

♗xd6 ♖xe5! (Black's point: the weakness of the long diagonal allows this shattering combination – White is left with an extra pawn and maybe a few hopes to draw) 13 ♗xd8 (Black wins after 13 fxe5 ♗xd6 14 exd6 ♕xc3+) 13...♖xf3+ 14 gxf3 ♖xd8 15 ♖c1 ♖c6 16 ♖e4 (maybe 16 ♕e2 is better than the game, though after 16...♖b4 Black should at least get his pawn back with some advantage) 16...♖b4 17 ♖c5 ♕f5 18 ♖xb7 ♖d7 19 ♖c5 ♖e7 20 ♖f2 ♖ae8 21 ♖e4 ♕xe4 22 fxe4 ♖xe4 23 ♕xa7 (or 23 ♖e1 ♖xe3 24 ♖xe3 ♕d4 winning by pin) 23...♖xf4+ 24 ♖g2 ♖a8 25 ♕c5 ♖xa2+ 26 ♖g3 ♕e5 27 ♕xb4 ♖xf1+ 28 ♖g4 f5+ and White resigned in view of the mate in four, 0-1 J.Duran Vallverdu-E.Janev, Salou 2000.

b) 9 ♗b3 doesn't do any better because of the following strong reply:



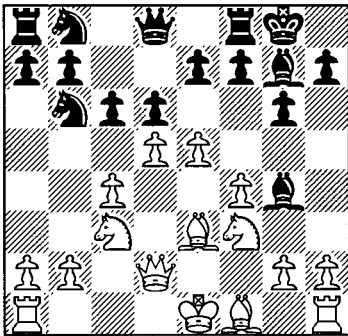
9...a5! 10 ♖g5 (or 10 a4 ♖a6 and Black can use the b4 hole) 10...a4 11 ♖xe6 axb3 12 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 13 a3 ♖c6 14 0-0-0 ♖a5 15 c5 dxc5 16 dxc5 ♖xd1+ 17 ♖xd1 ♖bc4 (Black is clearly better as White's overextended pawns are weak

in the ending) 18 ♖d4 ♜d8 19 ♙c3 ♜d5
20 ♙b4 g5 21 fxg5 ♜xe5 22 ♙xc4 ♜xc4
23 ♜e1 e6 24 h4 ♜d5 25 ♜e4 ♜e5 26
♜f2 ♙f8 27 c6 ♜xc6 28 ♙xf8 ♜xf8 29
♜c4 ♜d4 30 ♜c3 ♜xh4 31 ♜xb3 ♜a5 32
♜d3 ♜h2 33 ♜g3 ♜g7 34 ♜e4 ♜g6 35
b4 ♜c6 36 ♜c5 ♜d4 37 ♜g4 e5 38 ♜e4
♜xg2 39 ♜xe5 ♜xg5 40 ♜xg5+ ♜xg5 0-1
Brener-A.Pushkin, USSR 1988.

9...♙g4 10 ♜d2

No better is 10 ♙e2 ♜8d7 and White's centre collapses anyway; e.g. 11 exd6 ♙xf3 12 ♙xf3 ♜xc4 and White can't get out of this mess without losing at least a pawn.

10...c6!



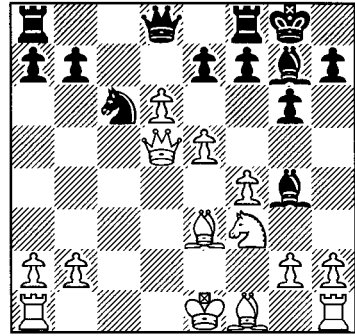
Black doesn't rush to win material, but rather opens lines against White's undeveloped position and uncastled king. 10...♙xf3 11 gxf3 ♜8d7 12 0-0-0 dxe5 13 f5! gives White some play.

11 c5

If 11 dxc6 ♜xc6 12 exd6 exd6 and the open lines help Black, or 11 0-0-0 cxd5 12 cxd5 dxe5 13 fxe5 ♜8d7 and the white centre collapses.

16...♜xd5 12 ♜xd5 cxd5 13 ♜xd5 ♜c6

14 cxd6



We saw this same f4/e5/d6 pawn chain in Letelier-Fischer after White's 9th move – and then it got smashed up just as it does here!

14...♙xf3 15 gxf3

Or 15 ♜xf3 exd6 16 0-0-0 ♜c8 (threat ...♜xe5+) 17 ♜b1 dxe5 and Black is better, as the white centre is completely destroyed and the white king is unsafe.

15...exd6

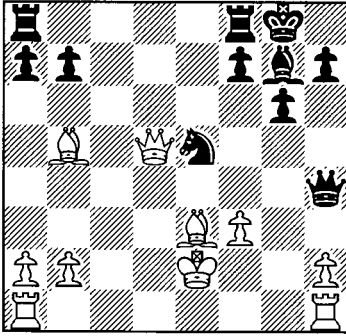
Just as in the previous note, Black's heavy pieces are connected, White's centre is disintegrating and his king is in trouble.

16 ♙b5

If 16 ♜xd6 Black doesn't exchange queens but plays 16...♜h4+! and "fracture him in the middlegame" like Fischer! One sees that both 17 ♙e2 ♜fd8 and 17 ♙f2 ♜xf4 are good for Black.

The other capture is also bad: 16 exd6 ♜e8 17 ♙f2 ♜xe3! (again like Fischer) 18 ♙xe3 ♜b6+ 19 ♙e2 ♜xb2+ and wins.

16...♜h4+ 17 ♙e2 dxe5 18 fxe5 ♜xe5



White has no centre and no king safety: this was a perfect strategical game by Sergeev, although Fischer might also deserve a credit!

19 ♖ad1 a6 20 ♙d7

20 ♙d3 ♜xd3 21 ♖xd3 ♜fe8 wins.

20...♜fd8 0-1

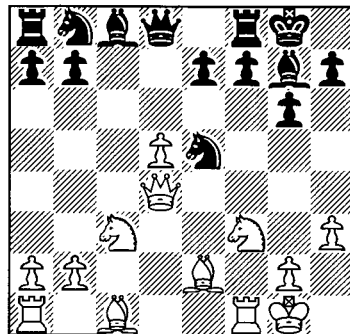
White resigns, for if 21 ♜xb7 ♜c4+ 22 ♙f2 ♜ab8 23 ♜a7 ♜xb2+ 24 ♙g3 ♜e2 and Black has a winning attack.

Which win was more fun: Svidler's memory marathon or this creative attacking game?

From an opening point of view, one should note that White's simple development not only failed to achieve anything, but led to a central collapse. Black was already better and halfway to victory on move 10!

This move order (♙e2 then ♜f3 on the next move) makes no significant difference, as Black can play ...♙g4 later if he wants to.

If White wants no inconveniences, he can play 6 h3 now to stop any such pin, but then he falls behind in development. In yet another Sergeev win, Vlad uses his active pieces to sac early and impale his foe on the long dark diagonal: 6 h3 ♙g7 7 ♜f3 0-0 (in some lines Black should wait to see which side White is going to castle on, but here one sees that h2-h3 and ♜f3 don't go with an attacking h2-h4 plan!) 8 ♙e2 ♙e6 9 d5 ♙c8 10 ♜c3 c6 11 0-0 cxd5 12 cxd5 ♜6d7 13 ♜d4 (White is determined to maintain his centre, but this exposed queen invites tactics) 13...dxe5 14 fxe5 ♜xe5! (demolition!)



15 ♜xe5 ♜c6 (Black can win his piece back without drama by playing 15...♜d6 here; instead he goes for a piquant double pin reminiscent of the Two Knights Defence) 16 ♜h4 (it might be best to give up the queen for three pieces: 16 ♜xc6!? ♙xd4+ 17 ♜xd4 ♜b6

Game 49

O.Quinones-K.Darga

Amsterdam Interzonal 1964

1 e4 ♜f6 2 e5 ♜d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♜b6 5 f4 g6 6 ♙e2

18 ♖e3!? ♜xb2 19 ♜fc1 ♜b4 with an extremely double-edged game, while 18 ♜d1 ♖d7 is about even; this might be an argument for the more solid 15...♜d6) 16...♜xe5 (now Black is just a pawn up and Sergeev converts stylishly) 17 ♖e3 (if 17 ♖h6, 17...♜b6+ 18 ♖h1 ♖xh6 19 ♜xh6 ♖f5 is very good for Black) 17...a6 18 ♜ad1 ♖d7 19 ♜e4 ♖f5 20 ♜g3 ♖d7 21 ♜e4 ♖f5 22 ♜g3 ♖c2! (no draw!) 23 ♜d2 ♜c8 24 ♖h2 (not 24 ♜c1 ♖f5 25 ♜xf5? ♜xc1+ 26 ♖h2 gxf5 and Black wins easily, or if 25 ♜xc8 ♖xc8! and Black saves his bishop and keeps his pawn) 24...♜d6 25 ♖h1 ♜c7 26 a3 ♜c8 27 ♖d4 f5 28 ♖c3 ♖b3 29 ♖b4 ♜f6 30 ♜f4 ♖c4 31 d6 exd6 32 ♜xd6 ♜f7 33 ♜fd1 h6 34 ♖xc4 ♜xc4 35 ♜d2 f4 36 ♜d8+ ♜xd8 37 ♜xd8+ ♖h7 38 ♜f1 f3 39 g3 f2 40 ♜d5 ♜f5 41 ♖g2 ♜c7 42 ♜e3 ♜c8 43 ♜f1 ♜d7 44 ♜e4 ♜d3 45 ♜g4 ♜c7 46 ♜xf2 ♜d4 47 ♜e7 ♜c6+ 48 ♖h2 ♜xb4 49 axb4 ♜d2 50 ♖g1 ♜f3 51 ♜c7 ♜xb2 52 ♜d6 ♜e2 53 ♜c7 h5 54 ♜f4 ♜xf4 55 gxf4 ♖d4 56 ♖g2 ♜xf2+ 57 ♜xf2 ♖xf2 58 ♖xf2 b6 59 ♖e3 ♖g7 60 ♖d4 ♖f6 61 ♖d5 ♖f5 62 ♖c6 a5! 0-1 V.Mrva-V.Sergeev, Bardejov 1996.

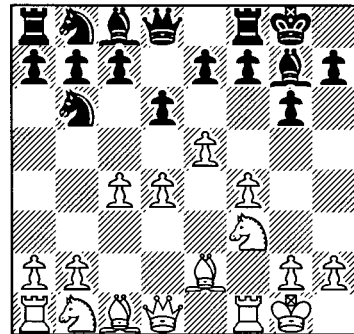
As we saw in some of the Exchange Variation lines, it's impossible to completely suppress Black's Alekhine counter-attack. Another point worth noting is that White's centre, threatened through the middle by the g7-bishop, is usually quite unstable.

6...♖g7 7 ♜f3 0-0 8 ♖e3

If White castles here, Black has two good continuations: 8...♖e6 trying to

force b2-b3 and so weakening the long dark diagonal, or 8...dxe5 and ...♖g4 with pressure on d4 and c4. The fact that Black has two good lines is a sign of the strength of Sergeev's 5...g6. Black can pretty much just play and make his own plans, rather than have to memorize an extremely precise long sequence, where any deviation can mean death, as for example in the first game of this chapter.

Let's take a quick look at these two variations – 8 0-0 and now:

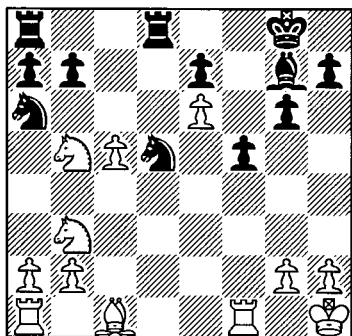


a) 8...♖e6 9 b3 c5 10 dxc5 dxe5! (another tactical blow on the long diagonal: Black smashes the white centre and leaves a piece en prise in view of his threats to exposed rook at a1) 11 ♜xd8 ♜xd8 12 cxb6? (12 fxe5 is necessary, when White is only a little worse after 12...♜6d7) 12...exf4 13 ♖xf4 ♖xa1 14 ♖c7 ♜c8 0-1 A.Daude Puvill-S.Beltran Rueda, Sitges 1995. White has no compensation for the exchange.

Sergeev faced 9 ♜bd2, avoiding b2-b3, but he still found a way to wind up with a nice queen sacrifice! 9...♜a6 10

a3 c5 11 d5 ♖c8?! (actually 11...♙f5 is more accurate, preventing White's next with equality) 12 ♖e4 ♙f5 13 ♖f2 ♖c8 14 b3 e6 15 dxe6 ♙xe6 16 ♙b2 d5 17 ♛c2 ♛c7 18 g4 f5 19 g5? (the same sort of mistake that Fernandez made against Petrosian in Game 8 – rather than closing the position, which gives Black time to counter-attack, White could have obtained the advantage here with 19 ♖g5) 19...♙fd8 20 ♖d2 ♙ac8 21 ♙fd1 ♛f7 22 ♙ac1 ♖b8 23 ♖f3 ♖c6 24 ♖d2 ♙f8 25 ♖h1 a5 26 a4 ♖d4 27 ♙xd4 cxd4 28 ♖f2 ♙a3 29 ♙a1 ♙b4 30 ♙dc1 dxc4 31 ♖xc4 ♖d5 32 ♛d1 ♖xf4 33 ♖d6 ♙xc1 34 ♙xc1 ♛e7 35 ♖c4 ♛xg5+ 36 ♙g4 d3 37 ♖f1 fxf4 38 ♖e4 ♛h4 39 ♖f6+ ♖h8 40 ♖g1 ♙c5+ 41 ♖h1 ♛xf6! and there's the queen offer – White resigned in view of the coming mate, 0-1 A.Chistiakov-V.Sergeev, Kiev 2002.

b) 8...dxe5 9 fxe5 ♙g4 10 ♖bd2 c5 11 ♖b3 cxd4 12 ♖fxd4 ♙xe2 13 ♛xe2 ♛c7 14 c5 ♖d5 15 e6 f5 16 ♖b5 ♛c6 17 ♖h1 ♖a6 18 ♖5d4 ♛a4 19 ♛b5 ♛xb5 20 ♖xb5 ♙fd8



(as so often in this variation,

White's centre is in pieces and his development is incomplete; the following desperate pawn sacrifice doesn't help matters) 21 ♙g5 ♙xb2 22 ♙ad1 ♙f6 and Black held on to his extra material and won in W.Bernardo-J.Szmetan, Mar del Plata 1996.

White's centre also collapsed after 10 ♖c3 c5 11 dxc5 ♖6d7 12 ♛d4 ♖xe5! (we've seen this tactic before! White's centralized queen proves to be prematurely developed) 13 ♛xd8 ♙xd8 14 ♙e3 ♙xf3 15 gxf3 ♖bc6 16 ♙fd1 ♖a5 17 ♙g5 ♖exc4 18 ♙xe7 ♙e8 19 ♖d5 ♖xb2 20 ♙dc1 ♖c6 21 ♙b5 ♖xe7 22 ♙xe8 ♙xe8 23 ♖xe7+ ♙xe7 24 c6 bxc6 25 ♙xc6 h6 26 ♖f1 ♖c4 27 ♙d1 ♖e3+ 0-1 H.Dittmann-C.Hamann, Büsum 1999.

8...dxe5

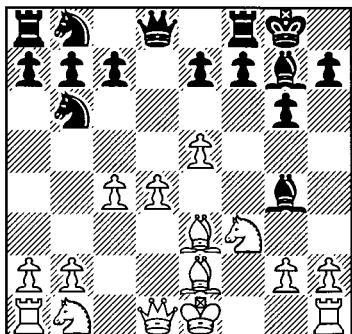
One could play even more sharply: 8...♖a6 9 0-0 c5 10 d5 ♖d7 and White must sacrifice something as, once again, his centre is collapsing – though the situation is not completely clear after 11 e6, when one of many complicated variations is 11...fxe6 12 dxe6 ♖b6 13 ♖g5 ♖c7 (13...♙xb2!?) 14 ♖f7 ♛e8 15 f5 gxf5 16 ♖h6+ ♙xh6 17 ♙xh6 ♙xe6 18 ♙xf8 ♛xf8 and Black has good compensation for the exchange.

9 fxe5

9 dxe5 ♛xd1+ 10 ♖xd1 (forced because of the weakness at c4) is clearly good for Black in view of White's exposed king; while 9 ♖xe5 c5 transposes into a kind of Kengis Variation that is fine for Black – see the next game for

this pawn structure.

9...♙g4



Now both c4 and d4 are at least indirectly pressured.

10 ♖bd2 c5

I like this immediate break, though Sergeev took his time here: 10...e6!? 11 0-0 ♘d7 12 h3 ♙xf3 13 ♖xf3 ♙e7 14 ♙e1 c5 15 ♙f2 (better is 15 dxc5, which prevents Black's coming reorganization) 15...cxd4 16 ♙xd4 ♙ac8 17 b3 ♖b8! 18 ♙fe1 ♖d6 19 ♙f1 ♖c6 (now Sergeev has everything the way he likes it: White's advanced e-pawn is under severe pressure from two Alekhine knights, and the defensive task proves too much for his opponent) 20 ♙c3 ♙fd8 21 ♖h1 a5 22 ♙ad1 ♖c5 23 ♙b2 ♙xd1 24 ♙xd1 ♙d8 25 ♙e1 ♖b4 26 ♙b1 ♙d7 27 ♙d4 ♖c6 28 ♙f2 h6 29 a3 ♙d8 30 b4 axb4 31 axb4 ♖d7 32 ♙b2 ♖xb4 33 ♙b1 ♖c6 (now Black is just a pawn up, since 34 ♙xb7? loses to 34...♙b8) 34 ♙h4 g5 35 ♙g3 ♖c5 36 ♙h2 h5 37 g4 hxg4 38 hxg4 ♙d7 39 ♙c2 ♖d4 40 ♖xd4 ♙xd4 41 ♙e2 ♙c7 42 ♙c1 ♙c6+ 43 ♖g1 ♖e4 44 ♙a1 ♙d2 45 ♙a8+ ♙f8

46 ♙a3 ♙b6+ 47 ♖h1 ♙b1+ 48 ♙g1 ♖g3+ 49 ♙xg3 ♙xe2 50 ♙f3 ♙h7+! 0-1 H.Nagy-V.Sergeev, Szombathely 2003.

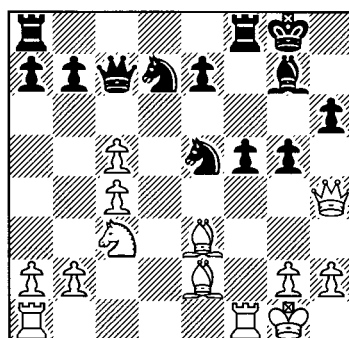
11 dxc5

Once again the white centre collapses, but if 11 d5 ♘d7 12 0-0 ♙c7 13 ♙f4 ♙xf3 14 ♖xf3 ♙xe5 and White doesn't have enough for the pawn.

11...♖d6 12 0-0 ♙c7 13 ♙e1 ♖c6 14 ♙h4 ♙xf3 15 ♖xf3 ♖cxe5 16 ♖g5

16 ♙xe7 just opens the e-file to dangerous effect: 16...♙fe8 17 ♙h4 (if 17 ♙d6?, 17...♙xd6 18 cxd6 ♖g4 wins a piece) 17...♖xc5 and Black's active pieces give him a clear advantage.

16...h6 17 ♖e4 f5 18 ♖c3 g5!



White made a gesture toward attacking the black king, but it's Black's counter-attack that really matters.

19 ♙h3 e6 20 ♖b5 ♙d8 21 ♙ad1 ♙e7 22 ♖d6 b6 23 cxb6

23 b4 maintains the knight but allows counterplay on the b-file after 23...bxc5 24 bxc5 ♙ab8.

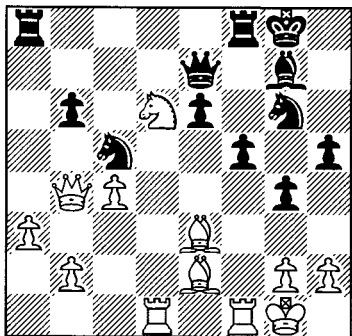
23...axb6 24 a3 g4 25 ♙g3 h5 26 ♙e1 ♖g6

Black prepares ...f5-f4 and the fur-

Alekhine Alert!

ther advance of his kingside pawns, so White tries for something on the queenside – but gets a shock!

27 ♖b4 ♘c5!



A truly startling Alekhine counter-blow: if White accepts the offered pawn in either of two ways, he loses his b-pawn in return and so weakens his remaining queenside pawns.

28 ♖d2?

White is so stunned he commits a fatal error: he has to take despite the consequences. Correct is 28 ♖xb6 ♘a4 29 ♖b3 ♖fb8 30 ♘b5 ♘xb2 31 ♖d2 ♘a4 with approximate equality; even 28 ♙xc5 bxc5 29 ♖xc5 ♙xb2 is only a little worse for White.

28...♖fd8

Just like that, Black is winning: the pin is decisive.

29 ♙xc5

If 29 b4 ♘e4 wins immediately.

29...bxc5 30 ♙h1 ♙f8

Accurate and conclusive; no doubt White was hoping to turn the tables after 30...♖a6? 31 ♘xf5, but his hope was not realized.

31 ♖e3 ♖xd6 32 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 33 ♖g5 ♙g7 34 ♖d1 ♖e7 35 ♖d2 ♙h7 36 ♙d3 ♙g7 37 ♖c2 ♖b8 38 b3 ♖f6 39 ♖b1 ♖c3 40 ♙xf5 exf5 0-1

White resigns, as Black wins without difficulty; e.g. 41 ♖xf5 ♙h6 42 ♖xc5 ♙d4 43 ♖f5 ♖xb3 44 a4 ♖xb1+ 45 ♖xb1 ♖xc4 46 a5 ♘f4 47 ♖d1 ♘h3! 48 gxh3 ♖d5+ and mates.

Black had no special problems in the game, but it was important that he always had his eye out for Alekhine-style counter-attack (18...g5, 27...♘c5) rather than just defence.

Game 50

H.Gretarsson-R.Polaczek
Reykjavik 1990

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 g6 6 ♘f3 ♙g7 7 ♙e3 0-0 8 ♙e2 dxe5

One of the simplest ways to play, as in the previous game: all White recaptures have their drawbacks. Of course Black can also play 8...♙e6 or 8...♘a6.

9 ♘xe5

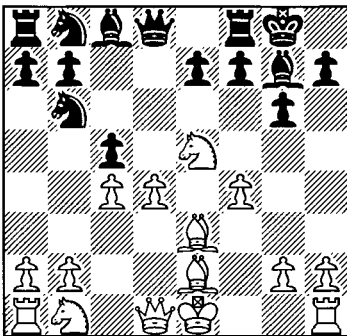
If 9 fxe5 ♙g4 and Black should be fine, à la Darga; while 9 dxe5 ♖xd1+ is a favourable queen exchange as White must take back with the king.

9...c5

This position is basically a Kengis, similar to some lines we saw in Game 23 – again, even if you want to play like Magnus with the hot 5...c6, you need to know the Kengis, since *everything*, even the Four Pawns Attack, may transpose

to it. Here Black has the standard Kengis plan of softening the long dark diagonal with ...c5.

In the game he plays it immediately as a pawn sacrifice, though the more solid 9...♘d6d7 is also perfectly playable, the only disadvantage being that White can go in for a very drawish line if he wants: 9...♘d6d7 10 ♖c3 c5 11 0-0?! (a mistake; 11 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 12 dxc5 ♖a5 13 ♖d2 ♖xc5 14 ♘d5 ♖xd2+ 15 ♖xd2 ♘a4 gives Black good counterplay, but 12 0-0 cxd4 13 ♖xd4 e5 14 fxe5 ♘xe5 15 ♖c5 ♖e8 16 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 17 ♖ad1 is about a dead draw as you can get by way of the Four Pawns Attack!) 11...cxd4 12 ♖xd4 ♘xe5 13 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 14 ♖xd8 ♖xd8 15 fxe5 (White has a weak pawn) 15...♘c6 16 ♘d5 ♖g7 17 ♖fe1 ♘xe5 18 ♘xe7 ♖e6 19 b3 ♖d7 20 ♘d5 ♖xd5 21 cxd5 ♖xd5, when Black emerged with a clear pawn plus and went on to win in I.Burovic-R.Zelcic, Bled 1993.



10 d5

Gretarsson (like Quinones in the previous game) is afraid to take the

offered pawn and runs into worse trouble. Best is 10 dxc5 ♖xd1+ 11 ♖xd1 (not 11 ♖xd1 ♖xe5 12 fxe5 ♘xc4 and Black will soon win a pawn) 11...♘d6d7 12 ♘d3 ♘c6 13 ♘c3 ♖d8 14 ♖c2 ♖d4 and Black's central play gives him good compensation for the pawn. Black also gets interesting counterplay with 11...♘a4!? 12 ♖c2 (12 b3 ♘c6 is another combination based on the weak long diagonal, a theme throughout the Sergeev Variation) 12...♘d7 13 ♘d3 e5 again with compensation.

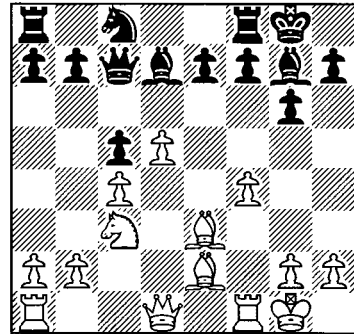
10...♘d8d7

Now Black has opened the Kengis long diagonal without cost.

11 ♘xd7 ♖xd7

But not the impetuous 11...♖xb2? 12 ♘xb6 axb6 13 ♘d2 and White emerges with two pieces for the rook.

12 ♘c3 ♖c7 13 0-0 ♘c8

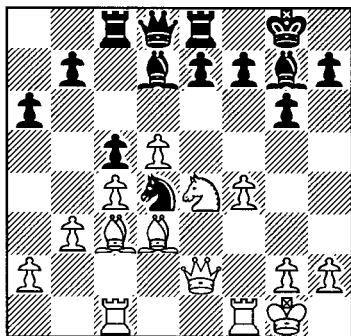


The knight finds its ideal blockading square on d6 – Black is slightly better as he is able continually to improve his position, while White has no play as his advanced pawns (d5, f4) are immobile.

14 ♖c1 ♖a5 15 ♖d2 ♘d6 16 ♖d3 ♖ac8

Alekhine Alert!

17 ♖e2 a6 18 ♙d2 ♜d8 19 b3 ♜e8 20
♘e4 ♗f5 21 ♙c3 ♘d4

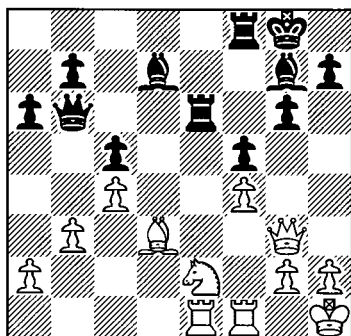


Now an even “more ideal” square!

22 ♙xd4?!

The computer wants to leave the knight there (just play 22 ♜f2), and the machine is right, for the consequence of the capture is that Black gets the two bishops and a significant advantage – but I sympathize with the human who wanted to get that terrible knight off the board!

22...♙xd4+ 23 ♙h1 ♜b6 24 ♜f3 ♜f8 25
♘g3 f5 26 ♜ce1 ♜ce8 27 ♗e2 ♙g7 28
♜g3 e6 29 dxe6 ♜xe6



Black has destroyed the white cen-

tre and stands better; the two bishops are even stronger now that the board has opened. Note that Black's set-up – rook on e6, ready to double, and king-side pawns at f5/g6/h7 is identical to the later stages of Letelier-Fischer. I would advise readers to study that game (the one non-Alekhine in the chapter!) thoroughly, because the ideas repeat over and over, as we have seen.

30 ♘g1 ♜fe8 31 ♗f3 ♜e3 32 ♙c2 ♜a5
33 ♜xe3 ♜xe3 34 ♜f2 ♜e8 35 ♙b1 ♙c6
36 h3 ♜c3!

Black sacrifices a pawn to penetrate into White's position.

37 ♜xc5 ♙xf3! 38 gxf3

White has to destroy his own pawn structure, for if 38 ♜xf3 ♜e1+ 39 ♜g1 ♜xg1+ 40 ♙xg1 ♜e1+ 41 ♜f1 ♙d4+ wins.

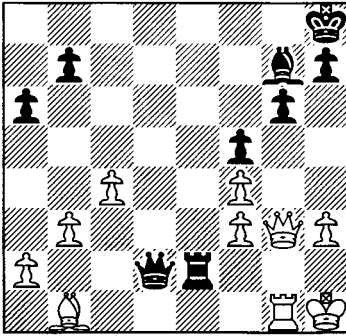
38...♙h8 39 ♜f2

Letting the black pieces in, but while the move seems like a blunder, when you try to find something better – there doesn't seem to be anything! After the logical-looking centralization 39 ♜d5 Black plays 39...♜e3 and White cannot take on b7 (if 40 ♜xb7? ♜e2 wins); but even after the careful 40 ♜d7 Black should win with 40...♙d4, intending ...♜e7, ...♙g7, and a sort of moving bind that will eventually overrun the kingside – while the sole surviving white bishop is a helpless spectator.

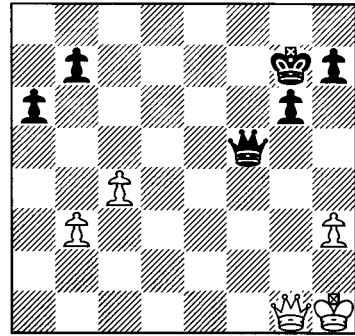
39...♜e3 40 ♜g3

40 ♙g2, not ceding the seventh rank, is White's last chance to hold.

40...♖d2 41 ♖g1 ♖e2



67...♖xf4+ 68 ♔h1 ♖xf5



Black's bind is so strong that he has a decisive advantage despite being a pawn down.

42 ♖g2 ♔d4 43 ♖xe2 ♖xe2 44 ♖g5 ♖g7

44...♖e1+ 45 ♔h2 ♖d2+ 46 ♔h1 ♖c1+ 47 ♔h2 ♖b2+ is quicker.

45 ♔xf5 ♖xf3+ 46 ♔h2 ♖f2+ 47 ♔h1 ♖f1+ 48 ♔h2 ♖f2+ 49 ♔h1 ♖e1+ 50 ♔h2

White is restricted to h2 and h1, for if 50 ♔g2 (danger zone!) 50...♖g1+ 51 ♔f3 ♖xg5 wins a piece.

Therefore Black can walk all the way over and take the a-pawn with check!

50...♖d2+ 51 ♔h1 ♖c1+ 52 ♔h2 ♖b2+ 53 ♔h1 ♖a1+ 54 ♔h2 ♖xa2+ 55 ♔h1 ♖a1+

And now walk all the way back!

56 ♔h2 ♖b2+ 57 ♔h1 ♖c1+ 58 ♔h2 ♖d2+ 59 ♔h1 ♖e1+ 60 ♔h2 ♖f2+ 61 ♔h1 ♖f1+ 62 ♔h2 ♖e2+ 63 ♔h1 ♖e1+ 64 ♔h2 ♖f2+ 65 ♔h1 ♖f1+ 66 ♔h2 ♔g1+! 67 ♖xg1

White must take, since 67 ♔h1 ♔e3+ wins the queen, while 67 ♔g3 ♖f2+ leads to mate.

Black emerges with a good extra pawn, and converts: slowly!

69 ♖d4+ ♔f7 70 ♖e3 ♖d7 71 ♔g2 ♔f6 72 ♖f4+ ♔e6 73 ♖g4+ ♔e7 74 ♖g5+ ♔d6 75 ♖g3+ ♔c5 76 ♖c3 ♖c6+ 77 ♔g1 ♔b6 78 b4 ♔a7 79 ♔f2 ♖e4 80 b5 ♖f5+ 81 ♔g2 ♖g5+ 82 ♔f3 axb5 83 ♖a5+ ♔b8 84 cxb5 ♖d5+ 85 ♔g3 ♖e5+ 86 ♔f3 ♔c8 87 ♖a8+ ♔c7 88 ♖a5+ ♔d7 89 ♖d2+ ♔e6 90 ♖a5 ♖d5+ 91 ♔g3 ♔f5 92 ♖b6 ♔e4 93 ♖a5 ♔d3 94 ♖a3+ ♔c4 95 ♖a2+ ♔c5 96 ♖a5 ♖d3+ 97 ♔h2 ♖d6+ 98 ♔g2 ♖b6 99 ♖c3+ ♔xb5 100 ♖b3+ ♔a6 101 ♖a4+ ♖a5 102 ♖c4+ ♖b5 103 ♖a2+ ♔b6 104 ♖f2+ ♖c5 105 ♖b2+ ♔c6 106 ♖f6+ ♖d6 107 ♖c3+ ♔d7 108 ♖g7+ ♖e7 109 ♖d4+ ♔e6 110 ♖c4+ ♔f6 111 ♖d4+ ♔f7 112 ♖c4+ ♔g7 113 ♖d4+ ♔h6 114 h4 g5! 115 ♖b6+ ♔h5 116 hxc5 ♖e4+ 117 ♔g3 ♖e5+ 118 ♔h3 ♖f5+ 119 ♔h2 ♖f4+ 120 ♔h3 ♖h4+ 121 ♔g2 ♖xg5+ 122 ♔h3 ♖f5+ 123 ♔h2 ♖e4 124 ♖c5+ ♔g4 125 ♖c8+ ♔f3 126 ♖h3+ ♔f2 127 ♖g3+ ♔e2 128 ♖c7 b5 129 ♖b6 ♔f3 130 ♖xb5 ♖h4+ 0-1

White resigns in view of the mate in

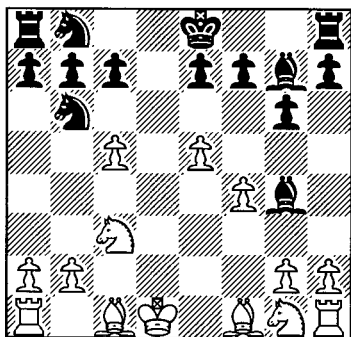
two – tremendous technique!

We see from this and the last two games that “normal” development doesn’t give White a thing. In the next two games White plays the only challenging line against the Sergeev Variation: the attacking sequence 6 ♖c3 and 7 ♕e3.

Game 51 D.Kotek-V.Sergeev Czech League 1997

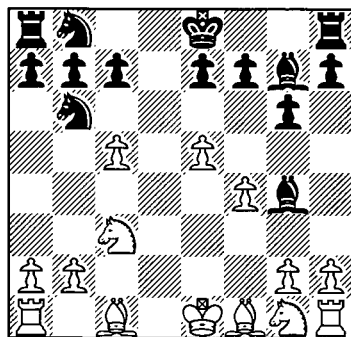
1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 g6 6 ♖c3 ♕g7

Before we continue with the main game’s correct 7 ♕e3, I should mention that my one recent Four Pawns game saw 7 c5, which is clearly premature. Black equalizes easily and has chances for the advantage in view of White’s misplaced king after 7...dxc5 8 dxc5 ♖xd1+ 9 ♔xd1 (if 9 ♘xd1 ♘d5 and Black is already better with his lead in development and centralized knight) 9...♕g4+ and then:



a) 10 ♖f3 ♘d6 11 ♕e3 (White’s best chance to equalize is 11 ♘d5 ♖d8, when both sides are somewhat compromised) and now, instead of my slow 11...♕xf3+ 12 gxf3 e6 with an approximately equal game and an eventual draw in R.Akopian-T.Taylor, Los Angeles (rapid) 2009, better is 11...♘c6, when Black has a harmonious position while White is still struggling to organize; e.g. 12 ♕e2 O-O-O 13 ♖e1 ♘b4 14 ♖c1 ♕xf3 (only now, after Black has completed his development) 15 gxf3 g5! 16 e6 fxe6 17 fxg5 ♘e5 with a clear advantage to Black, who has a real pair of Petrosian Knights!

b) 10 ♖e1 is even weaker, when Black took over the advantage in Larsen style:

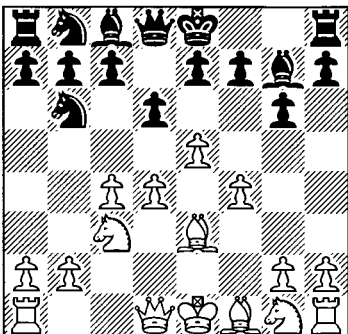


10...♘d6 11 ♕e3 ♘c6 12 ♕c4 g5 13 g3 gxf4 14 gxf4 ♕h6 15 ♖f2 O-O-O 16 h3 ♕e6! (Black is already better) 17 ♖b5 (opening the f-file helps Black: 17 ♕xe6 fxe6 18 ♖f3 ♖hf8 19 ♖g3 ♘dxe5! or 19 ♘e2 ♘b4 with advantage) 17...♘b4 18 ♖c1 c6 19 ♕e2 ♖f8 20 a3 ♘d3+ 21 ♕xd3 ♖xd3 (Black advantage

grows: he has the two bishops, while White's pawns are loose) 22 ♖ce2 ♗g6 23 ♗f3 ♜hd8 24 ♜c3 ♜xc3 25 bxc3 ♙c4 26 f5 ♙xe3+ 27 ♙xe3 ♜d3+ 28 ♙e4 ♜xf3 29 ♙xf3 ♙d5+ 30 ♙e3 ♙xh1 31 fxc6 hxc6 and Black converted the extra pawn into a full point in B.Gikas-J.Haakert, German League 1988.

7 ♙e3

Critical. By playing this precise move order White has created two threats: one is an early h2-h4 with a kingside attack and the white king castling long; the second is to play c4-c5, driving the black knight back. Note that, although Black can exchange queens in the second line, this is no real help as White can take back with the rook (instead of the king as above) – another point of the early queenside piece development. I believe Black has only one good move in this position (much like the last chapter's key early ...♗c6) and that is Sergeev's 7...♙e6!. The point is that Black can now meet 8 c5 with the centralization 8...♗d5.



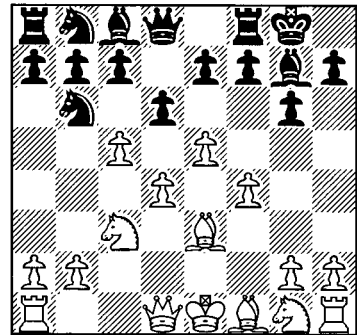
7...♙e6!

First played by Haakert in 1988, and developed by Sergeev, this move is the key to the entire variation.

But what if Black carelessly castles? Then White pushes back the knight with 8 c5 and attacks with h2-h4, while Black's pieces are too busy obstructing each other to defend properly.

Three examples of severe punishment follow – well, make that 2½ – in one game Black is evidently saved by divine intervention!

a) 7...0-0? 8 c5!



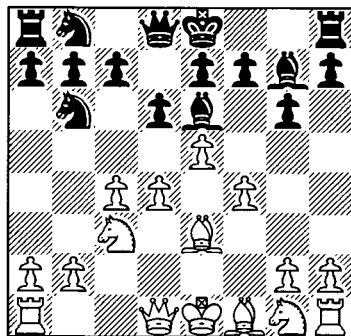
8...♗d6d7 (exchanging queens brings no relief; Black is cramped unto death after 8...dxc5 9 dxc5 ♜xd1+ 10 ♜xd1 ♗d6d7 11 ♗d5 and losing material too!) 9 ♗f3 (or the immediate 9 h4 as in 'b' and 'c' below) 9...b6 10 cxd6 cxd6 11 h4 ♙b7 12 h5 dxe5 13 fxe5 ♗c6 14 hxc6 hxc6 15 ♜d2 ♗dxe5 (faced with a mating attack – ♙h6 is coming, followed by the heavy pieces – the high-rated GM could find nothing better than sac and pray!) 16 dxe5 ♗xe5 17 ♗xe5 ♜xd2+ 18 ♙xd2 ♙xe5 19 0-0-0 ♜ac8 20 ♜e1 ♙f6 21 ♜h3 ♜fd8 22 g4 ♜c3 23 g5! (White has a deci-

sive advantage) 23...♙xg5 24 ♙xg5 ♖xg5 25 ♜xe7 ♜g1 26 ♜xb7 ♜xf1+ 27 ♚c2 ♜f2+ 28 ♚b3 ♜dd2 29 ♜xa7? (exchanging pawns a piece up is contrary to the basic rules of endings; after the correct 29 ♚a4 White should win fairly easily) 29...♜xb2+ 30 ♚a3 ♚g7 31 ♜a4 g5 32 ♜g3 ♚g6 33 ♜d4 f5 34 ♜d8 g4 35 ♜gd3 b5 36 ♜g8+ ♚f7 37 ♜b8 b4+ 38 ♜xb4 ♜xb4 39 ♚xb4 f4 40 ♚d5 g3 41 ♚xf4 ♜xf4+ 1/2-1/2 J.Fernandez Garcia-O.Korneev, Elgoibar 1996 – a very fortunate draw!

b) 7...0-0? 8 c5! ♚d6d7 9 h4 ♚c6 10 h5 dxe5 11 dxe5 ♚db8 12 hxg6 hxg6 13 ♚f3 ♜xd1+ (Black gets the queens off but is severely cramped in the end-game) 14 ♜xd1 ♙g4 15 ♚f2 e6 16 ♜d2 ♙xf3 17 ♚xf3 ♚e7 18 g4 ♚bc6 19 ♙b5 ♜ad8 20 ♜hd1 a6 21 ♙a4 ♜xd2 22 ♜xd2 ♜d8 23 ♜xd8+ ♚xd8 24 g5! (Black should have tried to break with ...g6-g5 before White slammed the door: now Black's cramp is fatal) 24...♚dc6 25 a3 ♚a5 26 b4 ♚c4 27 ♙c1 ♚d5 28 ♚xd5 exd5 29 ♙d7 b6 30 cxb6 cxb6 31 ♙c8 a5 32 ♙b7 axb4 33 axb4 b5 34 ♙xd5 ♚b6 35 ♚e4 ♙f8 36 ♙d2 ♙e7 37 ♙e1 ♚f8 38 ♙c6 ♚c4 39 ♙xb5 ♚a3 40 ♙d3 1-0 V.Dimitrov-E.Janev, Plovdiv 1988.

c) 7...0-0? 8 c5! ♚d6d7 9 h4 e6 10 cxd6 cxd6 11 h5 ♚c6 12 hxg6 fxg6 13 d5 ♚dxe5 (if 13...exd5 14 ♜xd5+ ♚h8 15 ♜xd6 White is a pawn up and threatening ♜xg6, so Black tries another desperation sac – but is not fortunate this time) 14 dxc6 ♚xc6 15 ♙b5 ♚e7 16 ♚ge2 a6 17 ♙a4 b5 18 ♙b3 ♚f5 19 ♙f2 b4 20 ♚a4 ♜b8 21 ♜c1 ♚h8

22 ♜d3 e5 23 fxe5 ♜g5 24 ♜h3 ♙h6 25 ♜d1 ♙b7 26 ♜h2 ♜be8 27 e6 ♙c8 28 g4 ♙xe6 (even more desperation) 29 ♙xe6 ♜xe6 30 gxf5 ♜xf5 31 ♙d4+ ♚g8 32 ♜xh6 ♜xe2+ 33 ♚xe2 ♜g4+ 34 ♚e1 ♜g3+ 35 ♜f2 ♜g1+ 36 ♙d2! and Black resigns as 36...♜xf2+ 37 ♚c1! wins the queen in view of the mate threat, 1-0 C.Bauer-W.Hug, Swiss Team Ch. 2001.



8 ♜b3

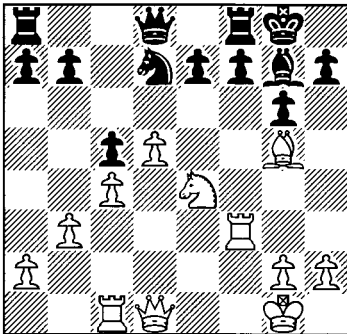
Strictly speaking the c-pawn does not have to be protected yet, as after taking twice White will have ♜a4+ (if Black is not castled). Once Black castles the threat will be real, so here White protects immediately.

The sharp central push 8 d5 will be covered in the next and final game of this chapter. Meanwhile, besides the queen move, White has several, mostly untried, alternatives:

a) 8 c5 ♚d5 is Black's point: with a centralized knight (or bishop, if White exchanges) he has nothing to fear.

b) 8 exd6 exd6 gives Black a good Exchange Variation, as the f4-pawn hinders White.

c) 8 b3 was tried in a training game between my friend Joe Cepiel and myself: 8...0-0 (8...dxe5 9 fxe5 0-0 10 ♖f3 c5 11 d5 ♙g4 12 ♙xc5 ♜8d7 13 ♙d4 ♜xe5 is also good for Black) 9 ♖f3 c5! (the typical break) 10 d5 (if White takes, one recalls the thematic combination cited in Game 48, note to White's 9th move: 10 dxc5 ♜6d7 11 cxd6 exd6 12 ♙xd6 ♜xe5! with advantage to Black) 10...♙g4 11 ♜c1 ♜8d7 (now White sacrifices a pawn, since 12 exd6 exd6 gives Black a good game with ...♞e8 coming and the white king doesn't have time to get castled) 12 ♙e2 ♙xf3 13 ♙xf3 dxe5 14 0-0 exf4 15 ♙xf4 ♜e5 16 ♜e4 ♜bd7 17 ♙g5 ♜xf3+ 18 ♙xf3 and now:



c1) 18...♞e8 leaves White with little or nothing for the pawn, as the following variations show: 19 d6 (if 19 ♜d6 ♙d4+ 20 ♖h1 f6 21 ♜e8 fxg5 and Black will emerge with a decisive material advantage of two pieces for a rook; or 19 ♙e2 ♙c7 20 ♜cf1 f5 21 ♜c3 e5 22 dxe6 ♜e5 23 ♞e3 ♜g4 24 ♙f4 ♙c6 25 ♞ef3 ♞xe6 with the winning Fischer bind we've seen a few times before –

instructive, though 24...♙a5 winning material may be even stronger) 19...♙d4+ 20 ♖h1 f6 21 ♙e3 (if 21 dxe7? ♙xe7 wins a piece) 21...e5 22 g4 ♞e6 and Black will soon sac an exchange on d6, getting two pawns for it and a dominating position.

The actual game took a less smooth course:

c2) 18...♜e5 19 ♞h3 b6 20 ♙e1 f6 21 ♙f4 – here I blundered with 21...♜g4? (21...♜f7 is correct, when Black is defensive but maintains the extra pawn), but Joe missed 22 ♜xc5!, recovering the pawn with some advantage, and played 22 ♙h4?, after which I consolidated, soon counter-attacked and won: 22...h5 23 ♞d3 e5 24 h3 ♜h6 25 ♙d2 ♜f5 26 ♙f2 ♜d6! (instead of going to the obvious d4-square, Black destroys the blockade on e4 and ends White's last hope) 27 ♜c3 f5 28 ♙g3 ♖h7 29 ♙g5 ♙d7 30 ♙h4 f4 31 g4 fxg3! 32 ♙xg3 e4 33 ♞dd1 ♞f3 0-1 J.Cepiel-T.Taylor, training game, Los Angeles 2009.

The key to this whole variation is that White can't hold his centre together after the strong break 9...c5!

d) 8 h4 – we saw this was very strong in the variation 7...0-0 8 c5 ♜6d7 9 h4!, but here the black knight is in play, threatening c4. While that pawn is at least partially protected by ♙a4+ at the moment, it seems that Black can ignore White's attack and play the rather daring 8...0-0!. Then as 9 h5 is destroyed by 9...♜xc4 and Black's play is much faster, White has to ven-

Alekhine Alert!

ture 9 d5 ♖c8 with an untried, very double-edged position, in which Black has good counterplay: I think White's centre will collapse before he can set up a mating attack – but you will need strong nerves to play this way, and remember, this is all new territory!

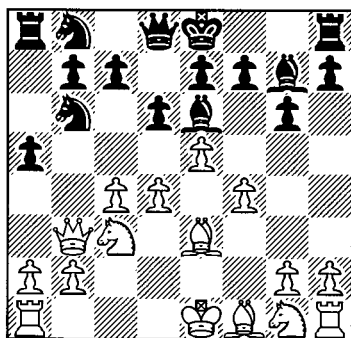
e) 8 ♖f3 is much quieter. With no danger of attack, Black can now calmly play 8...0-0, when we are back in Bauer-Sergeev, Game 48, which was good for Black.

f) 8 ♖e2 could lead to some fast and furious variations; for instance 8...0-0 9 d5 ♖f5 10 g4 ♖d7 11 h4 dxe5 12 h5 exf4 13 ♖xf4 ♖a6 and I don't think White has enough attack for the pawn.

But almost none of this has been tried: you don't have to memorize in these lines, you have to *think*.

Now back to our main game, where you might have forgotten that White just protected the c-pawn with 8 ♖b3.

8...a5



Black immediately fights back with an Alekhine/Larsen counter-attack!

9 a4

White goes onto the defensive and creates a hole at b4 – this is not the way to meet Black's sharp play. Also ineffective are 9 ♖f3 a4 10 ♖c2 ♖xc4 when Black snags a pawn, and 9 ♖e4 d5 when Black equalizes immediately.

To me the consistent move is to embrace the sharp position with 9 d5. We are in virgin territory here and I can only suggest a few ideas: 9...♖c8! looks best, defending b7 so as to free the Alekhine knight. If then 10 c5 ♖d7 11 ♖f3 dxe5 12 fxex5 ♖xe5 13 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 and Black is a pawn ahead, though White may have compensation with his mobile pawns and lead in development.

There's a lot to explore here!

9...♖a6 10 ♖d1 ♖b4

Hole in one.

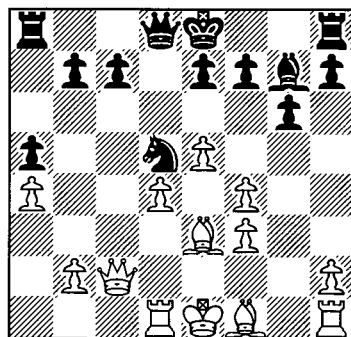
11 ♖f3 d5!

Hole in two!

12 cxd5

Weak is 12 c5 ♖c4, as the black knights have come strongly behind White's overextended pawns.

12...♖4xd5 13 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 14 ♖c2 ♖xf3 15 gxf3 ♖d5



A wonderful position for Black after just 15 moves! White has doubled pawns and two holes (at b4 and d5). The black queen or bishop might eye b4 or h4; in general Black is better all over the board.

Black wins speedily from here: only 79 moves, instead of the 130 of the previous game!

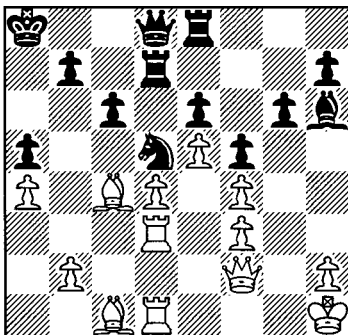
16 ♖c1 e6 17 ♜g1 ♜h4+ 18 ♜f2 ♜e7 19 ♙d2 ♜d7 20 ♙b5 c6 21 ♙e2 ♙h6 22 ♜g4 ♙f8 23 ♙f1 ♙b4

Black's good bishop probes weaknesses across the board.

24 ♙c1

If 24 ♙xb4 axb4 25 b3 White has a new hole at c3 and Black a potential knight outpost far into White's territory.

24...0-0-0 25 ♖g2 f5 26 ♜g3 ♖b8 27 ♖h1 ♜e7 28 ♜g2 ♜d7 29 ♙c4 ♙b6 30 ♙b3 ♜hd8 31 ♙e3 ♙d5 32 ♜d3 ♜e8 33 ♜g1 ♜d8 34 ♜gd1 ♜b6 35 ♖g2 ♜ed8 36 ♖h1 ♖a8 37 ♙c1 ♙f8 38 ♙c4 ♙b4 39 ♖g2 ♜a7 40 ♖h1 ♜e8 41 ♖g2 ♜b6 42 ♙b3 ♙f8 43 ♙c4 ♜d8 44 ♖h1 ♙h6



45 ♙xd5?

White cracks under the pressure. It's hard to tell if Black wins after the solid defence 45 ♜g3, but it's also hard to imagine White defending perfectly for the next hundred moves!

45...♜xd5 46 ♙e3 ♙f8 47 ♜c1 ♙b4 48 ♜c4 ♜b6 49 ♜b3 ♜ed8 50 ♖g1 ♜a6 51 ♜c2 ♙e7 52 ♜bc3 ♜8d7 53 ♜c4 ♖b8 54 ♜e1 ♜a7 55 ♜f2 ♜a6 56 ♜e1 ♜b6 57 ♜f2 ♜d8 58 ♜g3 ♜f8 59 ♜e1 ♙d8 60 ♜g3 ♜e7 61 ♜d2 ♙b6 62 ♜f2 ♜f8 63 ♙f1 ♜d8

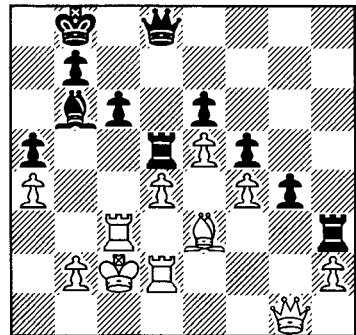
Black sets up the ideal position: note that due to the mistaken exchange on d5, Black has enough space to triple on the d-file.

64 ♙e1 ♙a7 65 ♖d1 h6 66 ♖c2 g5!

Black attacks on both wings; White is doomed.

67 fxg5 hxg5 68 f4 g4 69 ♖c1 ♙b6 70 ♖c2 ♜h7 71 ♜g1 ♜h3 72 ♜c3

If 72 ♜g2 ♜d7 73 ♖b1 ♜dh7 74 ♜cc2 ♜d5 with decisive penetration.



72...♜xe3!

Crunch!

73 ♜xe3 ♙xd4 74 ♜e2 ♙xc3 75 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 76 ♖xc3

Black is a pawn ahead, and White's early advanced pawns are very weak. In general White needs to win in the mid-dlegame with the Four Pawns Attack, as those eagerly pushed pawns are usually just targets in the endgame.

76...♖c5+ 77 ♔d3

77 ♔b3 ♖b4+ 78 ♔a2 ♖xa4+ might prolong the game several moves without changing the result.

77...♖b4 78 ♖f2

78 ♖c2 allows an easy win in the king and pawn ending: 78...♖e4+ 79 ♔c3 ♖xc2+ 80 ♔xc2 b5 81 axb5 (if 81 b3 ♔b7 82 ♔c3 ♔b6 83 ♔d4 c5+ 84 ♔c3 ♔c6 85 ♔d3 bxa4 86 bxa4 ♔d5 87 ♔c3 c4 and queening is not far off, or 81 ♔b3 ♔b7 82 ♔c3 ♔b6 83 ♔d4 bxa4 84 ♔c4 c5 85 ♔c3 ♔b5 86 ♔d3 ♔b4 87 ♔c2 c4 88 ♔b1 ♔b3 89 ♔a1 a3 and Black wins easily with two extra pawns) 81...cxb5 82 ♔c3 ♔c7 83 ♔d4 ♔c6 84 ♔c3 ♔c5 85 b3 a4 and the outside passed pawn ending is routine.

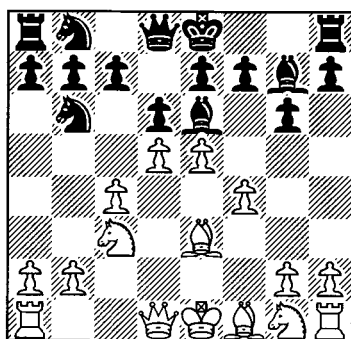
78...♖b3+ 79 ♔d4 ♖b6+ 0-1

The queen goes.

Just remember: play 7...♔e6!.

that you are almost out of book here (on move 8!) and there is much to discover. My feeling, based on my analysis, is that Black is fine, though you will have to think with your own head and play accurately.

For example, right now: where should the queen's bishop go? 8...♔f5 looks logical, but there are no games in the database with it.



8...♔c8

Sergeev plays cautiously, but since we don't have to fear being mated on the board (if Fritz mates me in analysis, all I have to do is hit the back arrow!), let's take a look at the more complicated 8...♔f5.

One of the great things about playing this line of the Alekhine is that we might find an improvement on move 8 – as opposed to move 21 or so in the old main line of the Four Pawns Attack, or somewhere around move 30 in the Voronezh.

We know that the bishop on f5 is stronger than on c8, but the first question is, can it be trapped? Let's try some

Game 52

M.Petr-V.Sergeev

Usti nad Orlici 2006

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 ♘b6 5 f4 g6 6 ♔e3 ♔g7 7 ♘c3 ♔e6! 8 d5

This blunt attempt to push Black back is the last serious test of the Sergeev Variation. I should note once more

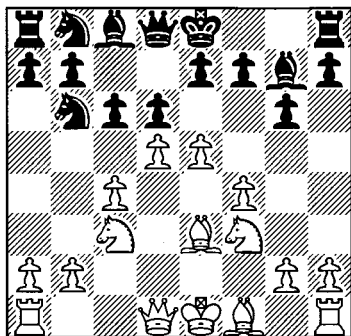
lines and consult the fearless *Fritz*: 8...♙f5 9 e6! fxe6 10 g4 ♙xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♙e4 12 ♖d4 exd5! 13 ♖xh8+ ♔d7 and Black, having only sacrificed a rook, looks good to me (White will have to toss material in turn) – the *Fritz*-ter optimistically says Black already has equals over plus!

If there's no trap, White might just develop with 9 ♘f3, but then Black can simply play 9...0-0 with approximate equality. So it's very possible one can improve right here.

9 ♘f3

Very risky is 9 e6 fxe6 10 h4 exd5 11 cxd5 e6 12 ♙d4 ♖e7 13 ♙xg7 ♖xg7 14 dxe6 ♘c6 15 ♘f3 ♙xe6 16 ♘g5 ♙f5 17 g4 ♙d7 18 ♖e2+ ♖e7 and White had nothing for the pawn in D.Flores-G.Llanos, Buenos Aires 1998.

9...c6



Black chips away at the centre and neutralizes White's positional threat of c4-c5, which would now be met strongly by ...♘xd5. So the text move certainly seems best, but given the lack of experience with this position, one

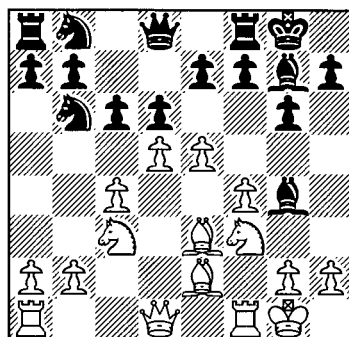
can hardly know for sure. For example, 9...♙g4 looks playable, even though Black (with three moves for his queen's bishop) is now a tempo down on Game 48. But can White use that extra tempo?

10 ♙e2

Fritz offers the curious 10 ♙f2 here, which it is very hard to imagine a human opponent playing. I think Black could just castle.

10...0-0 11 0-0 ♙g4

Better than 11...cxd5 12 cxd5 ♘d8d7 13 ♙d4, when White holds his centre.



12 ♖d2

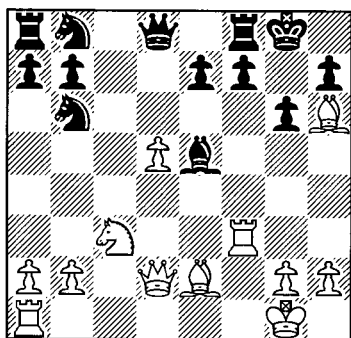
The game is sharp and critical for both sides: if 12 ♖b3 cxd5 13 cxd5 dxe5 14 ♘xe5 (after 14 fxe5 ♙xf3 15 ♙xf3 ♙xe5 16 ♖ac1 ♘d8d7 White doesn't have enough for the pawn) 14...♙xe2 15 ♘xe2 ♘d8d7 and White's centre is destroyed, leaving only weaknesses at d5 and f4 – but Black must not take prematurely! 15...♖xd5? loses to 16 ♙xb6 ♖xb3 17 axb3 and White wins a piece.

12...♙xf3 13 ♖xf3 cxd5 14 cxd5 dxe5

Alekhine Alert!

14...♘d7 is also possible, increasing the tension to breaking point, with a razor sharp and unclear position. One wild variation I found (for illustration only – the position cannot be firmly evaluated yet) is 15 exd6 exd6 16 ♖h3 f5 17 ♘b5 ♘f6 18 ♜c1 ♘e4 19 ♚b4 ♘d7 20 ♘c7 ♜c8 21 ♘e6 ♜xc1+ 22 ♙xc1 ♚c8 23 ♙e3 ♜e8 24 ♙d3 ♘df6 25 ♚b3 ♜e7 26 ♙xa7? b6 27 ♙xb6 ♚c1+ 28 ♙f1 ♘d2 29 ♚d3 ♘xd5! and Black wins, but there were many possible side trips on the way!

15 fxe5 ♙xe5 16 ♙h6



Perhaps the critical point of this opening and the Sergeev Variation: can Black play for a win with 16...♜e8 - ?

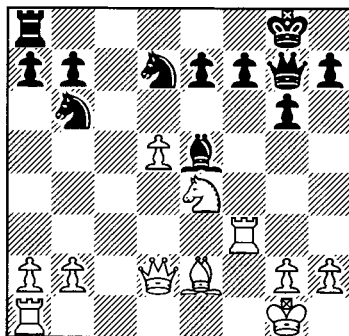
16...♘d7

The safest, but not the only move. Brave souls can try 16...♜e8 17 ♜af1 f6 18 ♖h3 ♘d7 (18...♙xc3!? 19 bxc3 ♘xd5 is even more daring, though probably overly risky after 20 ♜d1) 19 ♙g7! ♘f8 20 ♚h6 ♘bd7 21 ♙h1 f5 22 ♙xf8 ♘xf8 23 ♙b5 ♚b6 24 ♙xe8 ♜xe8 and Black has play for the exchange.

17 ♙xf8

If 17 ♖h3 ♜e8 18 ♙f4 ♙xf4 19 ♚xf4 ♚b8 20 ♚h6 ♘f8 holds, while 17 ♜af1 is met by 17...♚c7.

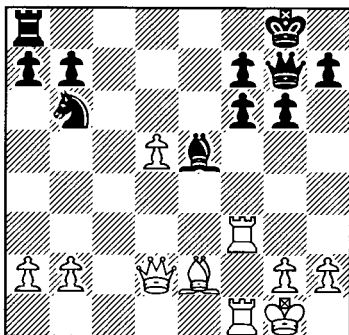
17...♚xf8 18 ♘e4 ♚g7



Black has a pawn for the exchange and a great position, but not one that can be translated into a win.

19 ♜af1 ♘f6 20 ♘xf6+ exf6

The invulnerable dark-squared bishop holds Black's position together.



21 d6 ♜d8 22 ♜d3 ♘c4 23 ♚b4 ♘xd6 24 ♜fd1 ♚h6 25 g3

25 ♜xd6? would be a big mistake: 25...♚hx2+ 26 ♙f1 ♜xd6 and wins.

25...♚f8 26 ♙f3 ♚e7 27 ♙g2

Not 27 ♙xb7? ♜b8 28 ♜xd6 ♙xd6

29 ♖xd6 ♖xd6 30 ♗xd6 ♗xb7 31 ♗xf6
♗xb2 32 ♗a6 ♗b7 and Black winds up
with an extra pawn in the endgame.

27...♔g7 28 a4 b6 29 b3 h5 30 ♖d2
½-½

One sees that White refused any of-
fers and, given his circumspect play,
Black cannot make progress.

Can Black play for a win by very
riskily keeping the pawn and not sacri-
ficing the exchange on move 16? We'll
have to leave that question for future
games – but one should note that,

much earlier, 8...♕f5 might be an im-
portant improvement.

Summary

Sergeev's logical kingside fianchetto,
informed by Fischer's ideas, seems to
give Black a game full of chances in
unexplored positions. White's idea of a
quick attack, seen in Games 51 and 52,
is so far the only challenging line, but if
Black plays precisely (7...♕e6!) he has
nothing to fear and can play for a win
in uncharted waters.

Chapter Seven

The Chase Variation – Back to the Centre

Our Hero: Viktor Korchnoi

I am far from the only chess author who finds it hard to wrap my mind around the Chase Variation, which comes about after the moves 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 c4 Nb6 4 c5 Nd5 . White drives the Alekhine knight from its relatively poor place on b6 to a fine central square on d5, from where it cannot be driven by a pawn, due to White's self-inflicted hole there. Meanwhile, the advanced white c-pawn has become weak, and is usually lost or exchanged to Black's advantage. Finkel writes, "There are many ways to meet the Alekhine Defence, but this one is definitely not the best." And Cox bluntly says, "4 c5 is really an ugly move!" And yet, one must note that many strong GMs play this move (GM Evgeny Sveshnikov plays it exclusively against

against the Alekhine, and does quite well) and, overall, the database tells us that White scores 52% with the Chase – not exactly overwhelming, but better than the Four Pawns Attack!

As far as my personal experience goes, in the last few years when I've played the Alekhine quite a bit, I didn't get a single Chase. About 30 years ago I did get one, and won easily using the counter-attack developed by this chapter's hero, Viktor "the Terrible" Korchnoi!

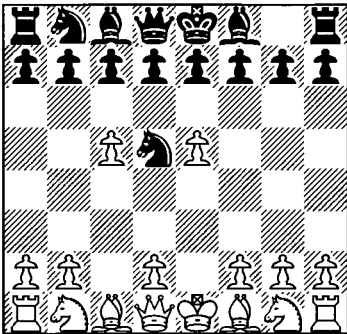
In general, this variation is not dangerous to the Alekhine player who is at all prepared, and should give you excellent chances to play for a win – but one should not assume that the anti-positional nature of the line should *automatically* give you a win!

Game 53
A.Jerez Perez-H.Westerinen
Saragossa 1995

1 e4 ♘f6

I'm not going to have a "Lines I Don't Like" in this chapter", but I'll just point out the one "reef" that Black should avoid. Most players who play the Chase, such as the aforementioned GM Sveshnikov, also play the Alapin Sicilian (2 c3) and there are many transpositions from one to the other – but these are not forced! While sometimes (as we'll see in the next chapter) it's good to transpose from the Alekhine to another opening, here I think the pure Alekhine Chase lines are at least equal for Black – so there is absolutely no reason to transpose to the c3 Sicilian where your opponent might be better prepared – see the note to Black's 6th move below.

2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♗b6 4 c5 ♗d5



Back to the centre!

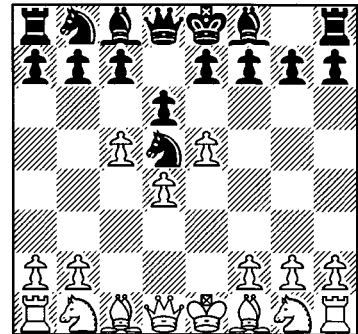
5 d4

This variation has scored remarkably poorly for White (only 43%) and is very easy to meet, so I will only spend one game on it and then move on to the main lines with 5 ♖c3 or 5 ♙c4, both of which attack Black's knight again and prevent the immediate equalization seen here. In both cases I recommend that Black simply defend the centralized knight with 5...e6, a move which also attacks the white c-pawn.

I will cover the popular gambit 5 ♖c3 e6 6 ♙c4 (White's moves can also come in the reverse order) in Games 54-57. Then 5 ♖c3 e6 without 6 ♙c4 will be seen in Game 58; and lastly, 5 ♙c4 e6 without 6 ♖c3 will be covered in Game 59.

5...d6

Under no threat, Black immediately takes the opportunity to break up White's pawns.

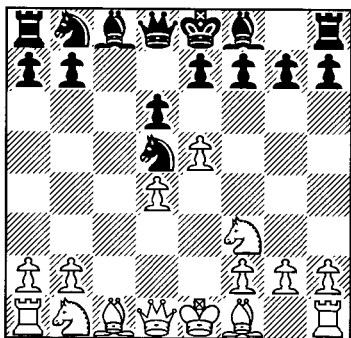


6 cxd6

White has no choice, for if 6 ♖f3 dxc5 7 dxc5 e6 there is no convenient way to defend the c5-pawn.

6...exd6!

Alekhine! The one trick of the Chase is seen if Black captures towards the centre (often a mistake in our opening – one recalls Chapter Five) with 6...cxd6, when 7 ♖f3 is an exact transposition to a main line Alapin Sicilian, even though the move number is higher (1 e4 c5 2 c3 ♖f6 3 e5 ♘d5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 d6 6 ♖f3 is the more efficient Sicilian order).

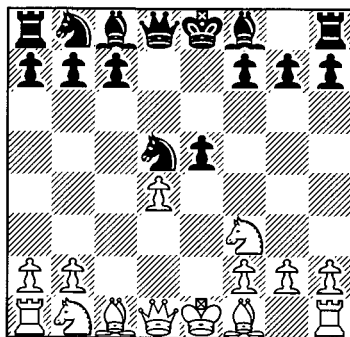


Sometimes an Alekhine player stumbles into such a morass (unaware that he has wandered into a different opening, one very familiar to his opponent) and something like this happens: 7...♗c6 8 ♙c4 ♗b6 9 ♙b5, and now the tried and tested move here is 9...dxe5 (of course in the Sicilian order it would be 8...dxe5) which is considered to give Black an even game. But the lost Alekhine player goes for an inferior alternative: 9...a6?! 10 ♙xc6+ bxc6 11 ♖c2 ♙b7 12 0-0 dxe5 13 dxe5 e6 14 ♙g5 ♖c7 15 ♗c3 (White is already clearly better) 15...h6 16 ♙h4 g5 17 ♙g3 g4 18 ♗d2 ♙g7 19 ♗de4 ♙xe5 20

♙xe5 ♖xe5 21 ♖b3 ♖c7 22 ♙ad1 ♙d8 23 ♖b4 c5 24 ♙xd8+ ♗xd8 25 ♗xc5 ♗c8 26 ♗xb7 ♗xb7 27 ♖xg4 and White won with his extra material in A.Maciejewski-M.Sarwinski, Bytom 1988.

Don't let this happen to you!

7 ♖f3 dxe5



8 dxe5

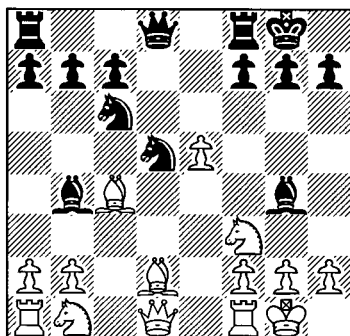
8 ♗xe5 is weaker: Black has free development and already has a blockader (note the great knight that was *forced* to go to d5) in front of the isolated d-pawn. White did not even get out of the opening alive in the following game: 8...♙b4+ (Fritz puts Black ahead already, and I agree: White can't play the natural ♗c3 and so must exchange bishops, while Black leads in development and the e-file is open) 9 ♙d2 ♙xd2+ 10 ♗xd2 0-0 11 ♙c4 f6! 12 ♖b3 c6 13 ♗d3 ♙e8+ (White has a terrible game, but the agony was not greatly prolonged) 14 ♙f1 ♙h8 15 ♙xd5 cxd5 16 ♗f4 ♗c6 17 ♖xd5 ♗xd4 18 ♙e1?! (18 ♖xd8 ♙xd8 is White's only hope, albeit a slim one, in view of Black's lead

in development and superior minor pieces) 18...♔d7 19 ♖xe8+ ♜xe8 20 f3 ♜e3! 21 ♜xd7 ♜xf4 22 ♚e1 ♜e3+ 23 ♚d1 ♜e8 24 b3 h6 25 f4 ♜e6 26 ♜c8+ ♚h7 27 ♜c4 b5 28 ♜b4 ♜d3 and there is no good way to stop the mate in one, so 0-1 R.Espinosa Flores-J.Boudy, Sagua la Grande 1988.

8...♔b4+

This and the following moves need no real comment, as Black develops rapidly with an even game.

9 ♔d2 0-0 10 ♔c4 ♜c6 11 0-0 ♔g4



12 ♜e1

Preferable is 12 h3 ♔xf3 13 ♜xf3 ♔xd2 14 ♜xd2 (if 14 ♜xd5, 14...♔f4 is slightly better for Black) 14...♜xe5 15 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 16 ♔xd5 ♜ad8 17 ♔xb7 ♜xd2 and Black's strong rook balances White's superior minor piece, with a draw being the most likely result.

12...♜e8 13 ♔xb4

Again, better is 13 h3 ♔xf3 14 ♜xf3 ♔xd2 15 ♜xd2 ♜xe5 16 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 17 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 18 ♔xd5 ♜d8 with a likely draw as before.

13...♜dxb4 14 ♜b3 ♔xf3!

Now it's too late for White to equalize: it's difficult to fight in an open position without full development, and here the sleeping queen's knight poisons White's entire game.

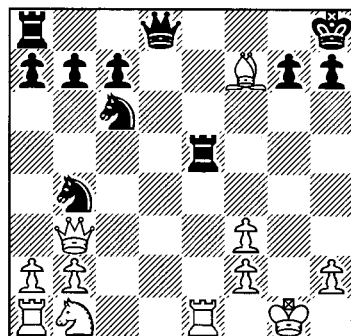
15 ♔xf7+

If 15 ♜xf3 (15 gxf3 ♜xe5 16 ♔xf7+ ♚h8 transposes to the game) 15...♜xe5 16 ♜c3 (after 16 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 Black has a decisive material advantage) 16...♜c2! exploits the back rank, e.g. 17 ♜xc2 ♜f3+! 18 gxf3 ♜xe1+ 19 ♚g2 ♜g5+ 20 ♚h3 ♜g1 and wins.

15...♚h8 16 gxf3

If 16 ♜xf3 ♜xe5 is too strong, or 16 ♔xe8 ♔d5 17 ♜g3 ♜xe8 and Black should win with two pieces for the rook.

16...♜xe5



White has no compensation for his shattered kingside; he had to go for the level endings earlier.

17 ♜c3 ♜d3 18 ♜xe5 ♜cxe5 19 ♜e4

No better is 19 ♔d5 ♜g5+ 20 ♚f1 ♜f4 with a winning attack.

19...♜h4 20 ♜e6 ♜xf3+ 21 ♚f1 ♜xh2+ 0-1

Black mates or wins the queen.

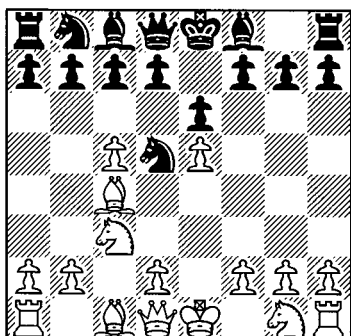
This 5 d4 line gives White absolutely nothing: a draw would be all he could hope for – unless of course Black slips up, obeys the rules, takes toward the centre, and wakes up in a strange Sicilian landscape!

Game 54
S.Nurkic-V.Sergeev
Pula 1991

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 c5 ♘d5 5 ♙c4 e6

I see no reason to investigate other moves such as 5...c6 when the text is so evidently simple and strong, and scores so well. Black maintains either knight or pawn in the centre, and immediately attacks White's overextended c-pawn.

6 ♘c3



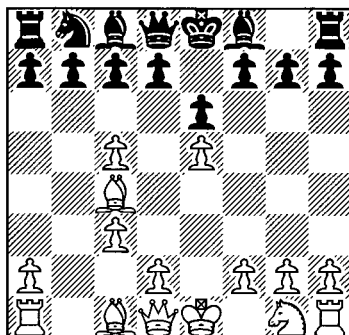
A popular (an astonishing 676 games in the database!) if rather doubtful sacrifice, which will be seen in this and the following three games. For the quieter 6 d4, see Game 59.

6...♗xc3

Again, there are other moves such as 6...c6, which is playable despite the appearance of a hole on d6 – but why? For a repertoire, the text move is simple and strong, so I see no reason to learn a bunch of different lines for a variation you will face so rarely.

7 bxc3

Usually White takes the other way (the subject of our next three games), but in my opinion both versions of the sac are dubious, so it doesn't matter too much. Note that after 7 dxc3 Black usually throws in 7...♗c6 before taking on c5, whereas here this wouldn't work, as White would play 8 d4.



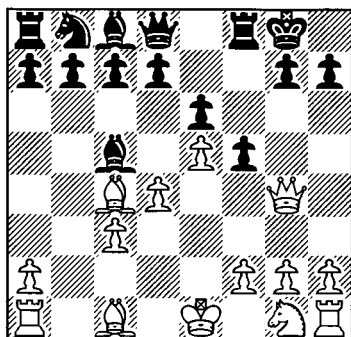
7...♙xc5

I can't see any reason why Black shouldn't take.

8 d4

Much weaker is 8 ♖g4 which doesn't interfere with Black's development. Black simply answers 8...0-0 (but certainly not 8...♕f8? when a world champion demonstrates long-term compensation: 9 d4 ♙e7 10 h4 h5 11

♖f4 f5 12 exf6 ♙xf6 13 ♜f3 ♜c6 14
 ♜e5 ♜e7 15 ♙d3 ♖e8 16 ♖f3 ♙g8 17
 ♜h3 ♙xe5 18 dxe5 ♜b8 19 ♜g3 ♖f7 20
 ♖f6 ♜d5 21 ♖d8+ ♖f8 22 ♜xg7+! ♙xg7
 23 ♖g5+ ♙f7 24 ♖g6+ ♙e7 25 ♙g5+
 ♜f6 26 ♙xf6+ ♖xf6 27 ♖xf6+ ♙e8 28
 ♙g6 mate! 1-0 Em.Lasker-Buchholtz,
 Copenhagen simul 1927) 9 d4 f5 and
 then:

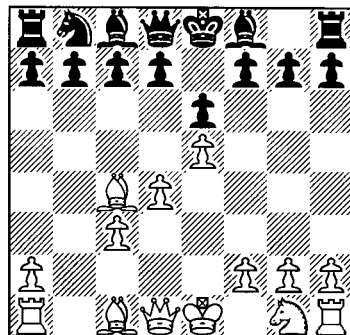


a) 10 ♖g3 d5 (even after the less ac-
 curate 10...♙e7 it's hard to find any-
 thing for White) 11 ♙h6 ♖e7 12 ♙g5
 (or 12 ♙xd5 exd5 13 dxc5 ♜c6 14 f4
 ♙h8 15 ♙g5 ♖xc5 and Black consoli-
 dates) 12...♖f7 13 ♙e2 ♙b6 and White
 has nothing for the pawn.

b) 10 exf6 ♖xf6 11 ♜f3 (of course
 not 11 dxc5? ♖xc3+ and wins) 11...d5
 (this zwischenzug is a common theme
 here) 12 ♙d3 ♙d6 and again one can't
 see any serious compensation for the
 pawn.

8...♙f8

Black aims for the type of French
 seen in the variation which starts 1 e4
 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 ♙b4 4 e5 b6 5 ♖g4
 ♙f8.



9 ♖g4

The best try, at least pinning Black
 down on the kingside for a while.

If 9 h4 d5 10 ♙d3 c5 11 h5 cxd4 12
 cxd4 ♜c6 and it's clear that White has
 nothing to show for his pawn: 13 ♜e2
 f6 14 f4 ♙b4+ 15 ♙f2 0-0 (Black now
 wins comfortably) 16 ♙g3 ♙d7 17 ♖c2
 f5 18 a3 ♙e7 19 ♜h3 a6 20 ♙h2 b5 21
 g4 ♜c8 22 ♖b1 ♙h8 23 gxf5 exf5 24
 ♙e3 ♙e6 25 ♜a2 ♜a5 26 ♖g1 ♜c4 27
 ♙c1 ♜f7 28 ♙b1 a5 29 ♜g3 ♙f8 30 ♜c3
 ♙b7 31 ♜ag2 ♙xa3 32 ♙xa3 ♜xa3 33
 ♜h3 ♜xb1 34 ♜xb1 b4 35 ♜d2 ♜c3 36
 ♜f3 ♜xf3! (beginning the decisive at-
 tack) 37 ♜xf3 ♖h4+ 38 ♜h3 ♖xf4+ 39
 ♙h1 ♜c7 40 ♜f2 ♖e4+ 41 ♜g2 f4 42
 ♜h4 h6 43 ♖f2 ♜f7 44 ♙h2 a4 45 ♜g6
 ♖e3 46 ♙g1 b3 47 ♜xe6 b2 48 ♙b6 a3
 49 ♙b8+ ♙h7 50 e6 a2 51 exf7 b1♖+ 52
 ♜xb1 axb1♖+ 53 ♙g2 ♖f5 54 ♜xf4
 ♖exf4 0-1 M.Bogorads-W.Breustedt,
 Bad Bevensen 2001.

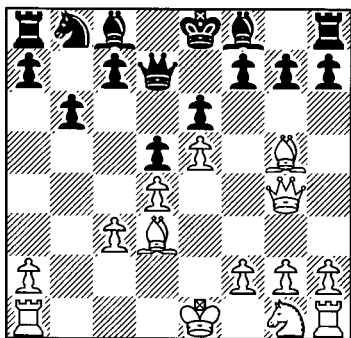
9...d5 10 ♙d3

If 10 exd6 cxd6 and Black is already
 better with a free extra pawn in the
 centre.

10...b6

After gaining a tempo on the bishop, Black goes over to the aforementioned solid, slow, French system – but with a nice bonus pawn!

11 ♖g5 ♜d7



12 ♘h3

Or 12 ♘e2 ♖a6 13 ♖xa6 ♘xa6 14 O-O h5 15 ♜f3 ♖e7 16 ♖xe7 ♜xe7 17 ♜d3 ♘b8 18 a4 ♘c6 19 ♜b5 ♜d7 20 ♘f4 ♘a5 (after a few accurate moves, White's attack has once again run out of gas; Black now patiently converts the extra pawn) 21 ♜e2 g6 22 ♜d3 ♘c4 23 ♜fb1 a5 24 ♜a2 ♜e7 25 ♜f3 ♜d8 26 ♜d1 ♜g5 27 ♘h3 ♜g4 28 ♜d3 ♜xf3 29 ♜xf3 ♖g8 30 ♘g5 ♖g7 31 h4 ♖e7 32 ♖f1 ♜d7 33 ♖e2 c6 34 ♜f4 ♖d8 35 ♘f3 ♖c7 36 ♘d2 ♘xd2 37 ♖xd2 ♖b7 38 ♜a1 ♖a6 39 g4 hxg4 40 ♜xg4 ♜h7 41 ♜h1 b5 42 axb5+ cxb5 43 h5 ♜xh5 44 ♜xh5 gxh5 45 ♜h4 b4 46 cxb4 axb4 47 ♜xh5 ♖b5 48 ♜h8 ♖c4 49 ♖e3 ♜c7 50 ♜b8 ♖c3 51 f4 O-1 M.Bosbach-W.Skulener, German League 1995.

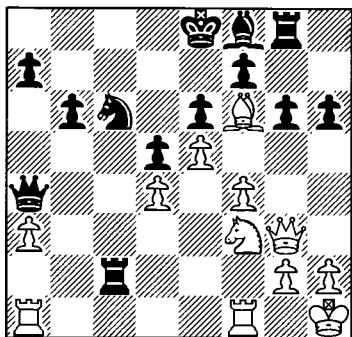
12...♖a6 13 ♖xa6 ♘xa6 14 O-O h6 15 ♖h4 c6 16 f4 g6 17 ♖f6 ♖g8 18 ♜h4 c5

19 ♖h1 ♜c8 20 ♘g1 ♜a4

We can now say, from the point of view of opening evaluation, that White has nothing real for the pawn. I concur with Fritz's +1 (one full pawn, no compensation) evaluation. However, I put this game in to show that Black does not have a simple walkover in the Chase Variation: yes, Black now has a "theoretically won position" but the White player who dares this opening probably enjoys risky attacking play. Care is required, and it may be easier to play White, despite the theoretical evaluation: White just has to throw everything at the uncastled enemy king, as otherwise he will surely lose – so his play is simple. Black, on the other hand, must safeguard his king (which can never castle), try to connect his rooks, and set up a passed pawn. Black must multitask, to use a trendy word, while White must only attack. The young Sergeev (our favourite from the last chapter, at the time of this game still a long way from his GM title) is unable to keep all his plates spinning and loses a game he should have won.

21 ♘f3 cxd4 22 cxd4 ♜c2 23 a3 ♘b8 24 ♜g3 ♘c6

Black has rearranged his pieces perfectly and now threatens to take the d4-pawn. Since the defence 25 ♜fd1 ♜a2 leads to favourable exchanges, White (whose task, as I mentioned, is simple) just throws another pawn at the black king and hopes for confusion or, at the very least, time consumption!



25 f5!? ♖d7

Black has a hard choice, while his clock is ticking: take the sacrificed f-pawn or take the already attacked d-pawn, or decline both?

25...exf5 is possible, and after 26 e6 (necessary, as 26 ♘h4 ♘xd4 27 ♙f4 ♙c4 is an easy win for Black) 26...fxe6 27 ♙c7 ♘e7 I can't find an attacking line for White.

But I think it is even better to cold-bloodedly but consistently *take the centre pawn*: 25...♘xd4! 26 ♘xd4 (26 ♙f4 ♙c4 gets White nowhere) 26...♙xd4 and I don't see any compensation for two pawns, especially as Black now has a protected passed centre pawn. A sample continuation is 27 fxe6 fxe6 28 ♙ac1 ♙c4 29 ♙e3 (not 29 ♙xc2? ♙xf1 mate!) 29...g5 and Black gradually consolidates with two extra pawns.

But cold-blooded defence requires experience and confidence!

26 fxe6+ fxe6 27 ♙f4

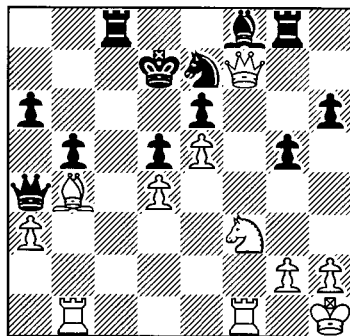
Now Black is only one pawn up, not two, and White has some sort of attacking position. Of course Black is still better, but it's not so easy.

better, but it's not so easy.

27...♙c4 28 ♙ad1 ♙c3 29 ♙de1 a6

29...♙xa3 is risky: 30 ♙a1 ♙b4 31 ♘h4 and White has potential entries into Black's position on both sides of the board.

30 ♙b1 b5 31 ♘h4 g5 32 ♙f7+ ♘e7 33 ♘e1 ♙c8 34 ♘b4



34...♙c2

Black can win with 34...a5 35 ♘c5 ♙g7 36 ♙h5 ♘f5, when White's attack is gone and Black's pawn majority is running.

35 ♘d2 ♙g7 36 ♙f6 ♙g6 37 ♙f7 ♙g7 38 ♙h5

White plays for a win against his inexperienced and probably time-pressured opponent, though objectively White should repeat the position.

38...♘f5

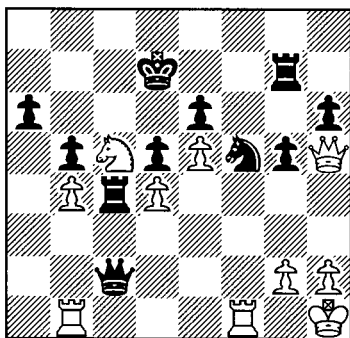
Again a forceful counter-attack should win for Black: 38...g4 39 ♘b3 ♙g5 40 ♙h4 (if 40 ♙f7?, 40...♙f5 wins immediately) 40...♘f5 41 ♙e1 g3 and Black's kingside pressure plus the extra pawn should be decisive.

39 ♘b3 ♘xb4 40 axb4 ♙c4?

Alekhine Alert!

The fatal and no doubt rushed 40th move; even now Black would be fine with 40...♖e3! (the key Alekhine idea is always counter-attack, not defence) 41 ♜f7+ (probably better is 41 ♜f3 ♘xf1 42 ♜xf1 ♜f5 43 ♜d1 ♜g6 44 ♘c5+ ♜xc5 45 dxc5 ♜f7, when White has some drawing chances despite the minus pawn) 41...♔d8 42 ♜g1 ♜xf7 43 ♜xf7 ♜xb3 and Black wins.

41 ♘c5+



41...♜xc5

Now it's too late for Sergeev: if 41...♔e7 42 ♜a1 and there are too many highways into Black's position.

42 dxc5 ♜e7 43 ♜h3 ♘h4 44 ♜fc1 ♜e4 45 ♜e1 ♜c2 46 ♜a1 ♜d2 47 ♜ed1 ♜xb4 48 ♜xa6 ♜xc5 49 ♜d6+ ♔e8 50 ♜xe6 ♜f2 51 ♜f6 ♜c2 52 ♜df1 1-0

Black has no real defence to ♜f8+.

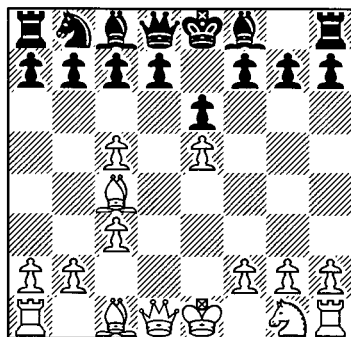
But Black was winning! Maybe once, twice, thrice, or five times – but White was attacking and the defence was not so easy. So even if you pick up a more or less clear pawn in the opening of the Chase, remember there is still a mid-game to come!

Of course, from an opening standpoint, White's pawn sacrifice must be objectively evaluated in Black's favour.

Game 55

E.Vasiukov-V.Korchnoi
Minsk 1953

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 c5 ♘d5 5
♙c4 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘xc3 7 dxc3



This move, opening the diagonal of the c1-bishop, is the more popular recapture – and means that Black must wait a move before taking the c-pawn, as White gets compensation after 7...♙xc5 8 ♜g4 ♙f8 or 8...g6, and even wins after 8...0-0? 9 ♙h6.

7...♘c6 8 ♙f4

Forced, since if 8 ♘f3? ♙xc5 and White has exactly nothing for the pawn, as he can't get his queen to g4.

8...♙xc5

This is the old main line, tried and tested for over 50 years, and White has been unable to do anything with it (in fact, from 1950 to the present, White

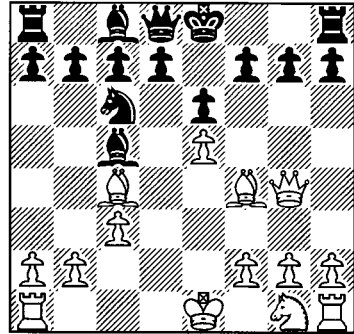
has only managed to score 42%!). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I faced the Chase Variation about 30 years ago, and played this line, followed with Korchnoi's counter-attack, sac'ed the exchange for a couple of pawns and won so easily I wondered why my opponent played this line at all! Unfortunately I no longer have the scoresheet to this game, but neither have I faced another Chase Variation in the last 30 years, and don't know when I'll see another one.

Therefore, given its rarity, I see no reason for the reader to memorize Suba's trendy and complicated new line, which is also quite good: 8...♖h4!? – the point is the following tactic: if White defends the f4-bishop in a normal manner, there is a trick based on the fact that the black queen and both white bishops are on the same rank; e.g. 9 ♖f3 ♜xe5! 10 ♙xe5 ♖xc4 and Black wins. Therefore, the weakening 9 g3 is forced, with the following continuation: 9...♖e7 10 ♜f3 (Cox suggests 10 b4 g5 11 ♙e3 ♜xe5 12 ♙d4, when White may have some compensation), and now Black can simply take on c5 (Sergeev) or play for a positional advantage with 10...b6 (Cox).

But all those queen moves are too complicated for me – especially since White has failed to find anything in the last 50 years to counter Korchnoi's idea, and I doubt anything much will come up now.

9 ♖g4

White attacks, but the theme of Alekhine's Defence is counter-attack, and that is our hero Korchnoi's specialty.



9...g5!

A bold move to play in the USSR Trade Unions Team Championship!

I should point out that 9...g5 is not the only move: Black can also retreat and defend, similar to the previous game, when it's not at all clear that White has enough for the pawn; e.g. 9...♙f8 10 ♜f3 d5 11 0-0-0 ♖e7 12 ♙d3 ♙d7 13 ♜g5 h6 14 ♜h7 0-0-0 15 ♙g3 f5 16 exf6 gxf6 17 ♜xf8 ♖xf8 18 ♜he1 e5 19 ♙f5 ♜g8 20 ♖h3 ♙xf5 21 ♖xf5+ ♙b8 22 ♙b1 ♖f7 23 f4 e4 24 c4 ♜e7 25 ♖h3 f5 26 cxd5 ♜xd5 27 ♙h4 ♜d6 28 ♙f2 ♜gd8 29 ♜c1 ♜b4 30 ♖a3 ♜a6 31 ♜cd1 ♜d3 32 ♖b3 ♖xb3 33 axb3 ♜g8 34 ♜e2 ♜xf4 35 ♜ed2 ♜d3 36 g3 ♜d6 37 ♙e3 h5 38 ♜f1 ♜d5 39 ♜e2 ♙c8 40 ♙d2 ♙d7 41 ♙c3 ♜g6 42 ♜g2 ♙e6 43 ♙c2 a5 44 h3 ♜b4+ 45 ♙b1 b6 46 ♜e1 ♜d3 47 g4 hxg4 48 hxg4 ♜xg4 0-1 O.Knudsen-M.Rohde, World Junior Ch., Innsbruck 1977.

On the other hand, Korchnoi's sharp counter is more fun to play, as Black immediately takes the initiative and White must play exactly to equalize – if he can of course!

10 ♖xg5

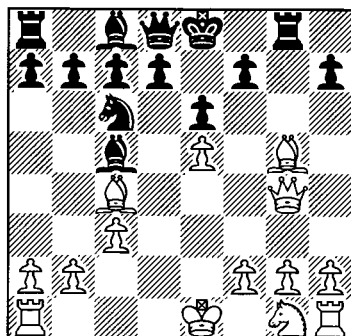
The only move to keep White in the game – the alternatives are much worse, as can be seen:

a) 10 ♖d2? ♜xe5 and Black is up two good pawns.

b) 10 ♖g3? h5 11 ♚e2 h4 wins a piece.

c) 10 ♚xg5 ♚xg5 11 ♖xg5 ♜xe5 12 ♖f6 ♜xc4! (this type of exchange sacrifice is a common theme of Korchnoi's counter-attack – of the seven games in the database that reached this position, Black won six and lost one, and that from a winning position) 13 ♖xh8 ♜xb2 (I recall that I got so far in that long ago Chase game, but beyond this my memory fails me – except that I don't think I had any more difficulties in winning the two pawns for the exchange ending than Popov does here) 14 ♖d4 ♖e7 15 ♜f3 f6 16 ♜b1 ♜c4 17 ♜d2 ♜xd2 18 ♜xd2 c5 19 ♖e3 d5 20 a4 e5 21 f3 d4 (Black wins by straightforward advance: there's nothing to do against the pawn avalanche) 22 ♖f2 ♖d8 23 ♜b5 b6 24 cxd4 exd4 25 ♜e1+ ♜f7 26 ♜a1 ♖d7 27 ♜b2 ♖e6 28 ♖e1 ♖d5 29 ♜d2 f5 30 ♜b1 ♖f6 31 ♜a2 ♜e8+ 32 ♖d1 c4 33 ♜b4 ♖e7 34 ♜b1 c3 35 ♖c2 ♖c5 36 ♖b3 ♖c6 37 ♜aa1 ♖e2 38 ♖xd4 (since if 38 ♜f1 ♖e6 mate) 38...♖xd4 39 ♖c4 ♖f6 0-1 E.Paoli-L.Popov, Dortmund 1973.

10...♖g8



A powerful pin: Black is close to winning on the spot, and White is struggling to survive.

11 ♜h3

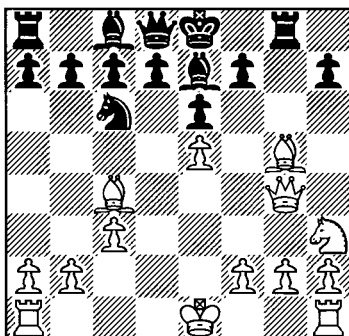
For 11 h4 see the next game; and for 11 ♖xd8 see Game 57.

The natural 11 ♜f3?? just loses a piece to 11...h6, as the c4-bishop won't be able to retreat with tempo: 12 ♖xd8 (if 12 h4 hxg5 13 hxg5 ♚e7 14 ♜h7 d6 White has nothing real for the piece) 12...♚xg4 and both white bishops are hanging.

Another loser is 11 f4 ♜xe5! 12 ♚h4 ♜xg5 (ox sacs are thematic) 13 fxg5 ♜xc4 14 ♚xc4 ♚xg5 and Black should win easily as in the Popov game above.

11...♖e7

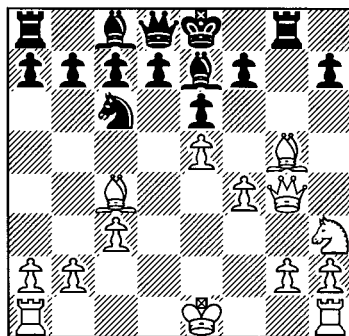
The point of putting the white knight on h3 is seen after 11...h6 12 ♖xd8 ♜xg4 13 ♖e2, when the bishop saves itself with tempo. Maybe White is minutely better after 13...♖xd8 14 ♖xg4 ♜xe5 15 ♖e2 d5 – Black has a great position, but only one pawn for the exchange.



12 f4

If 12 ♙xe7 ♜xc4 13 ♙xd8 ♜xc4 (stronger than 13...♙xd8 14 f4 ♜xc2 15 0-0-0 ♙e7 16 ♜dg1 ♜xc1+ 17 ♜xc1 d6 18 exd6+ cxd6 19 ♜g7 when White has some hope of a draw) 14 ♙xc7 ♜xe5! (a clever tactic that leaves Black with the superior minor piece in the ending) 15 ♙xe5 (White can't afford 15 ♙d6 ♜d3+ 16 ♙d2 ♜xb2) 15...♜e4+ 16 ♙d2 ♜xe5 17 ♜ae1 ♜xe1 18 ♜xe1 b6 19 ♜g5 ♙b7 20 g3 ♙e7 21 f4 f6 22 ♜e4 ♜g8 23 ♜f2 h5 24 ♜e3 ♙d5 25 b3 a5 26 c4 ♙c6 27 ♙c3 d6 28 a3 e5 29 ♜d3 h4 (Black has an easy game; White, a desperate struggle to draw) 30 b4 hxg3 31 hxg3 ♙d7 32 fxe5 dxe5 33 c5 axb4+ 34 axb4 b5 35 ♜f2 ♙e6 36 ♜d3 ♙d5 37 ♙b2 f5 38 ♜a3? (White, under pressure, commits a fatal mistake and Black alertly takes advantage; correct was 38 ♜e3 with a continuing small plus for Black) 38...f4! (with the idea 39 gxf4 ♜g2 winning the knight) 39 ♜a6+ ♙e7 40 ♜a7+ ♙d8 41 g4 (White can't get rid of all the pawns – if 41 gxf4 ♜g2 42 fxe5 ♜xf2+ 43 ♙c3 ♜f4 and Black should win) 41...e4

42 ♜a6 ♙e7 43 ♜d6 ♙a8 44 ♜a6 e3 45 ♜d3 f3 46 ♜a7+ ♙f6 47 ♜a6+ ♙g5 0-1
L.Tegzes-A.Baburin, Budapest 1990.



12...♜xe5

This game is historically important for the variation, and this is a great flashy move; but the modern player should probably improve with the computer-approved and easier 12...♙xg5, when White has no good reply, as the following variations show:

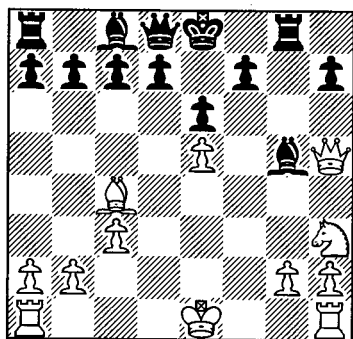
a) 13 ♜xg5 h6 and it's impossible to believe White has enough for the piece.

b) 13 fxg5 ♜xe5 14 ♜e4 ♜xc4 15 ♜xc4 d6 (15...d5!? 16 ♜h4 ♜g7 is also good for Black and might be simpler) 16 ♜f1 ♜g7 17 0-0-0 e5 (Black is a pawn up and White has no real compensation; when White works hard to get it back, he allows a powerful counter-attack) 18 ♜f6 ♜e7 19 ♜d5 ♜b8 20 ♜e4 ♙e6 21 ♜a4+!? (now Black takes over, but otherwise he will consolidate his extra pawn) 21...♜d7 22 ♜xa7 ♜c8 23 ♜a4+ (necessary, since if 23 a3? ♙b3 24 ♜e1 b6! traps the queen) 23...b5 24 ♜h4 (the last hope is 24 ♜c2, though Black has a

very strong attack after 24...b4) 24...♙xa2 (now Black has a pawn again *and* an attack) 25 ♖h6 ♜f8 26 g6 ♜g8 27 gxh7+ (White can't find counterplay; if 27 ♖g5 fxe6 or 27 gxf7 ♜xf7 28 ♜xf7 ♜xf7) 27...♜h8 28 ♜df1 ♖g4! (it's over) 29 ♖e3 ♙b3 30 ♜f2 ♜a8 31 ♙d2 ♜a2 32 ♜b1 ♜xb2+ 0-1 P.Corbat-D.Ghysens, correspondence 2001.

c) 13 0-0 ♜xe5 14 ♖h5 ♜xc4 15 ♖xh7 ♜f8 (White conjures up amazing counterplay and finally draws after this natural move: it seems that the counter-intuitive 15...♙f6!! is best, which lets a rook go with check but ends White's attack; e.g. 16 ♖xg8+ ♜e7 17 ♖g3 d5 and Black has a decisive advantage) 16 fxe5 ♜e5 17 ♜f6 ♖e7 18 ♜af1 d6 19 g6! (the attack keeps coming; one sees now it would have been better to donate the rook and win with the two pieces!) 19...♜xg6 20 ♜xf7 ♜xf7 21 ♖xg6 ♜f8 22 ♜g5 ♜xf1+ 23 ♜xf1 ♖e8 24 ♜h7+ ♜e7 25 ♖g5+ ♜f7 26 ♖h5+ ♜e7 27 ♖g5+ ♜f7 28 ♖h5+ ½-½ L.Tegzes-B.McLaren, Vancouver 2005.

13 fxe5 ♙xg5 14 ♖h5



14...b5?!

This leads to a draw in the main game, but White could even try for an advantage.

The alternative is 14...♜g7, when Black plays for a win, but must face some attack – here's a recent example: 15 0-0 ♖e7 16 ♜h1 b6 17 ♙e2 ♙b7 18 ♙f3 ♙xf3 19 ♜xf3 0-0-0 20 a4 f6?! (20...f5, avoiding the following sac, gives Black the better game) 21 ♜xf6! ♙xf6 (missing the point; necessary is 21...♜dg8 with equality) 22 ♖f3! (winning a piece due to the mate threat) 22...d5 23 exf6 ♖f7 24 fxe7 ♖xg7 25 a5 ♜f8 26 ♖e2 ♜f6 27 axb6 cxb6 28 ♖b5 ♖c7 29 ♜g5 ♜b7 30 ♖e8 ♜h6 31 h3 e5 32 ♜e6 ♖b8 33 ♖d7+ ♜a8 34 ♜c7+ 1-0 P.Corbat-P.Benyovszki, correspondence 2000.

15 ♖xh7 ♜f8 16 0-0!

16 ♙d3 looks better for White, who has recovered his material and still has attacking chances.

Instead, Vasiukov plays it safe and forces the draw.

16...bxc4 17 ♜xf7 ♙e3+ 18 ♜h1 ♜xf7 19 ♖h8+ ½-½

It's perpetual check.

White survived here and even had chances for advantage at one point – but none of that would have happened after 12...♙xg5, when Black wins a piece or a pawn and White has no real compensation. With Vasiukov's line discredited, Chase players have tried other moves to rehabilitate their gambit...

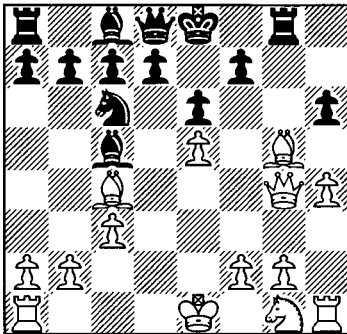
Game 56
J.Pachow-V.Bagirov
Berlin 1995

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 c5 ♘d5 5
♘c3 e6 6 ♙c4 ♘xc3 7 dxc3 ♘c6 8 ♙f4
♙xc5 9 ♖g4 g5 10 ♙xg5 ♖g8

We saw in the previous game that 11 ♘f3 and 11 f4 failed, and that Vasiukov's 11 ♘h3 should have led to a Black advantage after 11...♙e7 12 f4 ♙xg5!

Here White tries to improve by protecting the bishop with the h-pawn; while in the next game he just breaks the pin at once with the queen exchange 11 ♙xd8 ♖xg4.

11 h4 h6



12 ♘f3

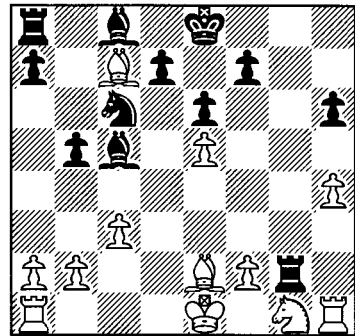
This piece sacrifice turns out to be unsound on various levels, so 12 ♙xd8 ♖xg4 13 ♙e2 ♖xg2 14 ♙xc7 was preferable, although it's not clear that White can equalize here either after 14...b5!

But not 14...b6?! 15 b4 ♙xf2+ (or

15...♙e7 16 ♙f3 ♖g8 17 b5 and White wins; Black needs to block the key b5-square and keep b6 for his bishop – the pawn itself is not important) 16 ♙f1 ♖xg1+ 17 ♙xf2 ♖xa1 18 ♖xa1 ♙b7 19 ♖g1 and White was better in J.Rojo Gomez-F.Pacorro, Spanish Team Ch. 1993.

Also inferior is 14...♙xf2 15 b4 ♙e3 16 ♖h3! ♖g2 (forced, but now White gets Black's important dark-squared bishop) 17 ♖xe3 ♖xg1+ 18 ♙f1 and White's two bishops give him compensation for the pawn.

Returning to the critical position after 14...b5!, White has three plausible replies:



a) 15 ♙xb5 ♙b7 (White's motley position is difficult to hold) 16 ♘h3 (not 16 b4? ♙xf2+ 17 ♙f1 ♘e7 and Black has a decisive advantage) 16...♖g4 17 ♖g1 ♖e4+ 18 ♙f1 ♘xe5 19 ♖d1 a6 20 ♙e2 (the black bishops rule after 20 ♙xe5 axb5) 20...d5 with some advantage to Black due to his greater central control.

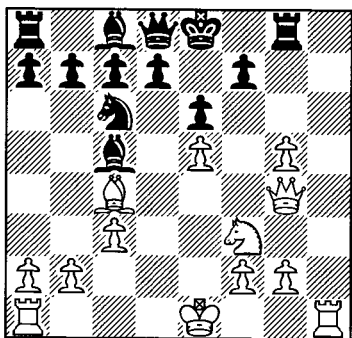
b) 15 b4 ♙b6 16 ♙d6 (or 16 ♙xb6

axb6 17 ♖f3 ♙a3 18 ♔d2 ♜xf2 19 ♜hg1 ♕e7 and White's position is coming apart) 16...♙b7 17 ♖h3 a5 18 ♙xb5 axb4 19 ♙xc6 (if 19 cxb4 ♖d4 20 ♙d3 ♜g4 and the h1-rook is in trouble) 19...♙xc6 20 ♙xb4 ♙a4 with a clear plus for Black in view of White's ragged pawns that will soon start dropping off the board.

c) 15 ♖h3 ♙b7 16 ♖f4 ♜g8 (not 16...♜xf2? 17 ♖d3) 17 ♔d2 (17 ♙xb5?! ♖xe5 discovers on White's rook) 17...♖e7 18 ♜hg1 and White can hope for a draw, but probably unsuccessfully after 18...♜xg1 19 ♜xg1 ♙xf2.

In short, one sees that the ending is not very promising for White – but I think the piece sacrifice, as played, is worse!

12...hxg5 13 hxg5



13...♖xe5

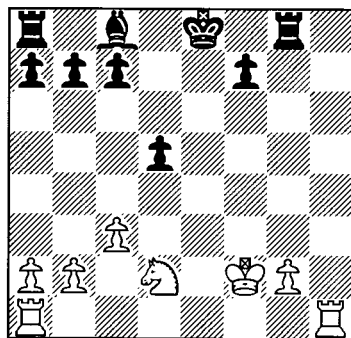
This and the next few moves show the Grandmaster avoiding all “complications” and aiming for a simple, technical, pawn up ending. However, I see nothing wrong with keeping the piece, and can't find a serious attack if Black

just develops with the idea of castling long; e.g. 13...♙e7 14 ♜h7 d6 15 0-0-0 (or 15 g6 ♜xg6 16 ♜h8+ ♔d7 and Black walks away) 15...♙d7 16 g6 0-0-0 with a decisive advantage.

14 ♖xe5 ♙xg5 15 ♙e2 d6 16 ♖f3 ♙f6

16...♙xg2 is quite playable, but Black doesn't want to allow any counterchances and is in no hurry to win!

17 ♖d2 d5 18 ♙xd5 ♙xf2+ 19 ♙xf2 ♙xf2+ 20 ♙xf2 exd5



With that “enviable consistency” Black has reached the technical end-game of his dreams: extra pawn + better minor piece + GM technique = 0-1.

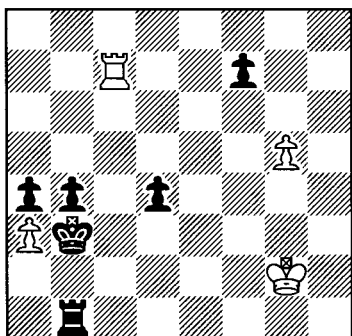
21 ♖f3 ♙e6 22 ♖d4 ♔d7 23 ♙ae1 ♜g7 24 ♙e3

The four rook ending after 24 ♖xe6 fxe6 25 ♜h6 ♜ag8 doesn't look like a draw.

24...♙ag8 25 g3 c5 26 ♖e2 ♜g5 27 a3 a5 28 ♖f4 ♔d6 29 ♜h7 ♜f5 30 ♜f3 b5 31 ♖xe6 ♜xf3+ 32 ♙xf3 ♙xe6 33 g4 a4 34 ♙f4 ♜g6 35 g5 d4 36 ♜h8 ♔d5 37 ♜d8+ ♜d6 38 ♜c8 ♜d7 39 ♙f3 ♜e7 40 ♙f4 ♜e2 41 ♜d8+ ♔c4 42 ♙f3 ♜xb2 43 ♜d7 ♜b1 44 ♙g2 b4! 0-1

There may be simpler wins, but I like this pawn advance – a precise winning method that contains two motifs. One, Black creates two passed pawns that cannot both be stopped, and thus will win a rook at least. Two, in any pawn race Black will queen first, while White will queen on the same file as his king, allowing a devastating skewer.

White has to play 45 cxb4 (as 45 axb4 a3 46 ♖a7 dxc3 wins immediately using the separated pawns theme, and 45 ♖xf7 loses to the skewering theme: 45...bxa3 46 g6 a2 47 g7 a1♚ 48 g8♚ ♖g1+ and wins) 45...cxb4 46 ♖c7+ (again 46 axb4 a3 47 ♖a7 d3 shows the separated pawns going through) 46...♙b3, and after these forced moves White now has four tries that, alas, all lose:



a) 47 axb4 a3 and the a-pawn costs White a rook.

b) 47 ♖xf7 bxa3 48 g6 (if 48 ♖b7+ ♙c2 49 ♖c7+ ♙d3 50 ♖a7 a2 wins a rook) 48...a2 and Black wins with either the previously seen skewer or a fork: 49 g7 a1♚ 50 g8♚ ♖g1+ is the basic skewer, and 49 ♖b7+ ♙c2 50 g7 a1♚ 51

♖xb1 ♙xb1! 52 g8♚ ♖a2+ is the fork.

c) 47 ♙f2 bxa3 again wins a rook.

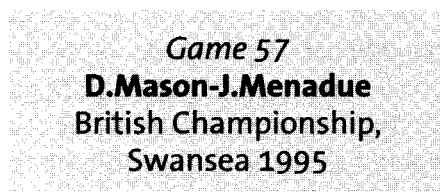
d) 47 ♖b7 d3! 48 ♖xb4+ (if 48 ♖d7 d2 49 ♖xd2 ♖b2 50 ♖xb2+ ♙xb2 51 axb4 a3 52 b5 a2 53 b6 a1♚ 54 b7 ♖a7 and Black gets back in time; he also wins the pure pawn ending after 48 ♙f2 d2 49 ♖xb4+ ♙a2 50 ♖xb1 ♙xb1 51 ♙e2 ♙c2) 48...♙a2 49 ♖d4 d2! 50 ♖xd2+ ♖b2 and the pawn ending isn't close.

There is beauty in pure technique like this.

White appreciated it as well, and rather than trying out any of the losing lines above, simply cut to the chase and resigned!

Going back to the opening, we see that White is barely holding on after 11 h4. His best chance is to go into the inferior ending after 12 ♙xd8 as his piece sac doesn't look sound, though Bagirov's simple play was a slower and also effective refutation.

Evidently White's last hope against Korchnoi's 9...g5 counter is to exchange queens right away, and we will examine this in the next game.

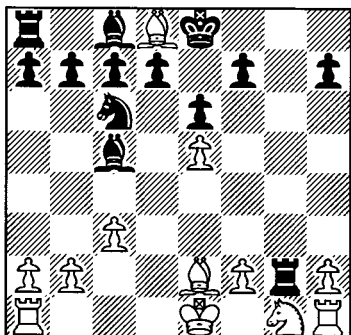


1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 c5 ♘d5 5 ♙c4 e6 6 ♘c3 ♘xc3 7 dxc3 ♘c6 8 ♙f4

♙xc5 9 ♖g4 g5 10 ♙xg5 ♜g8 11 ♙xd8

The last gasp of the ♙c4/♘c3 gambit: White's ambitions have dwindled to hoping to draw the endgame!

11...♜xg4 12 ♙e2 ♜xg2



13 ♙xc7

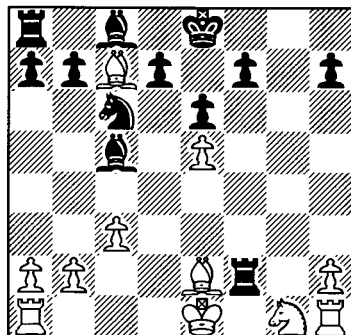
After 13 ♙h4 ♜g8 14 ♘f3 ♙e7 15 ♙g3 b6 16 0-0-0 ♙b7 17 h4 0-0-0, Black consolidated his extra pawn and won smoothly: 18 ♜he1 d6 19 exd6 ♙xd6 20 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 21 ♘g5 ♜g7 22 ♜xd6 cxd6 23 ♘e4 ♙c7 24 ♘f6 ♙d8 25 ♙d3 ♘e5 26 ♙xh7 ♙e7 27 ♘g8+ ♜xg8 28 ♙xg8 ♘d3+ 29 ♙d2 ♘xe1 30 ♙xe1 ♙e4 31 f3 ♙f5 0-1 M.Cristobal-C.Godoy, Argentine Ch., Buenos Aires 2004.

13...♜xf2

Best. Weaker is 13...b6 (as noted in the previous game, ...b7-b6 is a mistake in similar positions as White is able to take over the dark squares – see the position after 19 ♙d6) 14 b4 ♙xf2+ 15 ♙f1 ♜xg1+ 16 ♙xf2 ♜xh1 17 ♜xh1 ♙b7 18 ♜g1 ♘e7 19 ♙d6 ♘g6 20 h4 f6 21 exf6 ♙f7 22 h5 ♘h4 23 ♜g7+ ♙xf6 24 ♜xd7 ♘f5 25 ♙f4 ♙e4 26 ♜xh7 e5 27 ♙d2 ♜d8 28 ♙e1 ♘g7 29 ♙e3 ♙xh7 30

♙h4+ ♙e6 31 ♙xd8 ♙b1 32 a4 ♙f7 33 a5 bxa5 34 bxa5 ♘f5+ 35 ♙d2 e4 36 ♙c4+ ♙g7 37 ♙g5 ♘g3 38 h6+ ♙h7 39 ♙e3 ♘f5 40 ♙xa7 1-0 I.Alonso Aranzabal-L.Bermejo Arruego, San Sebastian 2000.

In the previous game the variation 11 h4 h6 12 ♙xd8 ♜xg4 13 ♙e2 ♜xg2 14 ♙xc7 b5! was discussed, and I pointed out that 14...♜xf2 15 b4 ♙e3 16 ♜h3! was not so good for Black, who had to exchange off his important dark-squared bishop. However, this only happened because White had ♜h3 to attack said bishop – since in this game that move is impossible, there is no reason not to take the pawn.



14 ♘h3

Black doesn't have to worry if White tries to divert the c5-bishop: 14 ♙d6 ♙xd6! 15 ♙xf2 (after 15 exd6 ♜g2 16 ♘f3 b6 17 ♘h4 ♜g8 18 ♙f2 ♙b7 19 ♜hg1 0-0-0 Black holds his position and the extra pawn) 15...♘xe5 16 ♘f3 ♘g4+ 17 ♙e1 f5 18 ♘d4 b6 19 ♘b5 ♙e5 and Black reaches a typically favourable counter-sac position. Black

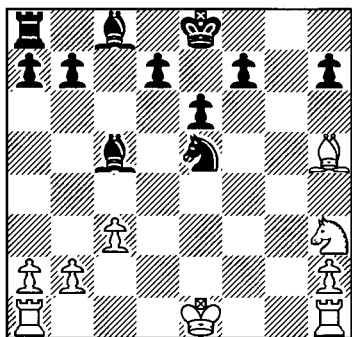
actually has what I would call material advantage: exchange down, but with two extra pawns. This type of line occurs over and over in Korchnoi's anti-Chase.

As noted above, 14 b4 is not to be feared without h2-h4 and ...h7-h6 inserted: Black plays 14...♙e3 and if White tries 15 h4 he is too slow: 15...♘e7 16 ♖h3 ♗g2 17 ♗xe3 ♗xg1+ 18 ♙f1 ♘d5 and wins.

14...♖f5 15 ♙g4 ♗xe5+! 16 ♙xe5 ♘xe5

Not a sac, but a favourable trade.

17 ♙h5



17...♙e3?!

Losing time; the simple 17...♙e7, preparing to bring his pieces out, should win for Black; e.g. 18 ♘g5 (on the quiet 18 0-0-0 d6 19 ♖he1 ♙d7 Black will win mechanically with his extra pawns) 18...d5 19 ♘h7 ♙d7 20 ♘g5 ♗g8 21 h4 f6 22 ♘h3 (if 22 ♘f3 ♘d3+ 23 ♘d2 ♘f4 wins the bishop) 22...♘d3+ 23 ♘d2 ♗g2+ 24 ♙e2 (not 24 ♘xd3? ♙b5+ 25 c4 ♙xc4+ 26 ♙c3 b5 and mates) 24...♘xb2 25 ♖ab1 ♙b5 26 ♘f4 ♘c4+ 27 ♙e1 ♙f2+ 28 ♘d1 (White

can end it all with 28 ♙f1 ♘e3 mate) 28...♙a4+ 29 ♖b3 ♗g3 30 h5 ♙e3 and Black wins.

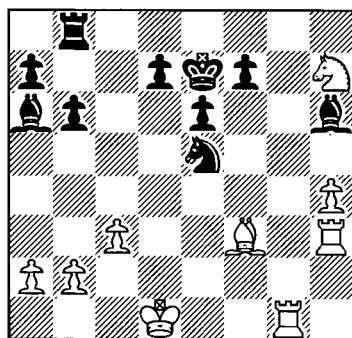
18 ♙e2 ♙h6 19 ♖ag1 ♘g6 20 ♙f3 ♖b8 21 ♘g5 b6

Black finally develops! 21...♙xg5? would be a mistake because 22 ♗xg5 d5 23 ♙e3 ♙f8 (or 23...♙d7 24 ♖h5 with the initiative) 24 h4 is strong – Black should not lightly exchange his key dark-squared bishop.

22 ♘xh7 ♙e7 23 h4

23 ♘g5 immediately is safer, escaping the danger zone.

23...♘e5 24 ♖h3 ♙a6+ 25 ♙d1



25...♙d3?

Black misses a forced win: 25...♖h8 26 ♘g5 f6 27 ♘e4 ♘xf3 28 ♗xf3 ♙b7 and wins; e.g. 29 ♖e1 f5 30 ♗xf5 exf5 31 ♘c5+ ♙e4 etc.

26 ♘g5 f6 27 ♙e4 fxg5 28 ♙xd3 g4 29 ♖hg3 ♙f4 ½-½

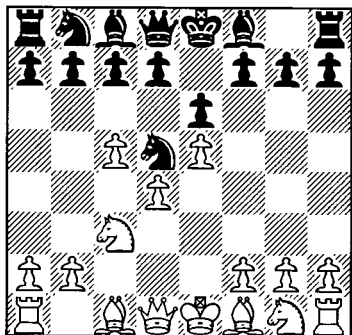
Now best play is 30 ♗xg4 ♘xg4 (but not 30...♘xd3? 31 ♙c2 ♙e3 32 ♗g7+ ♘d8 33 ♖1g3 ♘e1+ 34 ♘d1 ♙f2 35 ♖h3 ♘c7 36 ♖f7 when White should win) 31 ♗xg4 ♙e5 with a dead draw.

Despite the drawn result, Black had two major chances to get a winning advantage. It turns out that the best White can get out of the ♖c3, ♙c4 gambit (if Black is armed with Korchnoi counterplay) is a somewhat worse ending.

Black needs to remember that exchange sacrifices are standard in this variation, and will usually be extremely favourable, especially if you can pick up two extra pawns.

Game 58
V.Sveshnikov-A.Shabalov
Liepaya (rapid) 2004

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♗d5 3 c4 ♗b6 4 c5 ♗d5 5
♗c3 e6 6 d4



Since the gambit (with 6 ♙c4) that we've been examining falls short, Chase players, led by 4 c5 aficionado GM Evgeny Sveshnikov, have turned to this move (note that the White player here is Vladimir Sveshnikov, not GM Evgeny Sveshnikov, though two of Ev-

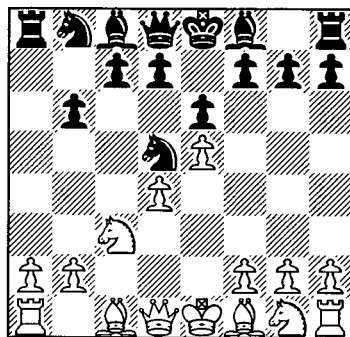
geny's games will be featured in the notes).

All the same, Black's opening difficulties are essentially nil, as he can immediately attack the advanced c-pawn and force a favourable Larsen-style exchange (Black moves towards the centre!).

Note that the alternate move order 6 ♗xd5 exd5 7 d4 makes no difference, as Black transposes to the main game with the thematic 7...b6.

6...b6 7 ♗xd5

7 cxb6 axb6 improves Black's position due to the aforementioned Larsen-style exchange and the half open a-file as well. Following are a couple of typical Black wins where his queenside pressure is a strong factor:



a) 8 ♙c4 ♗xc3 9 bxc3 (Black isolates the a-pawn, but the white d-pawn is unexpectedly the first to drop!) 9...d5 10 exd6 cxd6 11 ♗f3 ♙e7 12 0-0 ♙a6 13 ♙xa6 ♖xa6 14 a4 0-0 15 ♙e3 ♗d7 16 ♖b3 ♖a8 17 ♖a2?! (White can hope to draw with 17 c4, when his weak pawns have a little potential mobility) 17...d5

(but now they're fixed targets) 18 ♖f4 ♜c8 19 ♜d2 ♜c6 20 ♜c1 ♜ca8 21 ♜ca1 h6 22 h3 ♜a7 23 ♜h1 ♖f6 24 ♜b4 ♜f8 25 ♖d6 ♜g6 26 ♜b3 ♜a8 27 ♜d2 ♜c8 28 ♜c1 (an oversight, though I doubt that other moves would hold in the long run) 28...♖xd4! 29 c4 ♜ca8 30 ♜b3 ♖f6 31 a5 bxa5 32 ♜xa5 ♜xa5 33 ♜xa5 ♜xa5 34 ♜xa5 ♜xd6 35 ♜a8+ ♜h7 36 cxd5 exd5 37 ♜d1 d4 38 ♜e8 ♜d5 39 f3 ♜e5 40 ♜g1 d3 41 ♜c8 ♜c4 42 ♜a6 0-1 M.Palek-P.Freisler, Plzen 2000.

b) 8 ♜xd5 exd5 9 ♜f3 ♖e7 10 ♖e2 ♖a6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♖f4 ♜c8 13 a3 ♜c6 14 ♜c1 ♖xe2 15 ♜xe2 ♜a6 16 ♜xa6 ♜xa6 17 e6 fxe6 18 ♖xc7 ♖f6 19 ♜fd1 ♜c8 20 ♖d6 ♜ca8 21 ♜f1 b5 22 ♖e5 ♜a4 23 g4 b4 24 ♖d6 bxa3 25 bxa3 ♜f7 26 h3 ♖e7 27 ♜e5+ ♜xe5 28 ♖xe5 ♜xa3 – the weak a-pawn finally drops off the board and Black went on to win in I.Werner-L.Krizsany, Bern 1998.

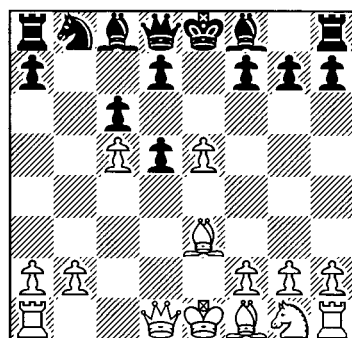
White also has another possible 7th move: I should not fail to mention the zany 7 ♜g4 bxc5 8 ♜xd5 exd5 9 ♖g5 d6! (now that's a true Alekhine counterblow!) 10 ♖xd8 ♖xg4 11 ♖xc7 dxe5 12 dxe5 c4 (Black has emerged with the better centre and better endgame) 13 f3 ♖b4+ 14 ♜d1 ♖e6 15 a3 ♖c5 16 ♜e2 ♜d7 17 ♖xb8 ♜axb8 18 ♜c2 ♖f5+ 19 ♜d1 ♖xb2 20 ♜c3 ♖e3 21 g4 ♖e6 22 ♜a4 ♜d2+ 23 ♜e1 ♜b8 24 h3 ♜e7 25 ♜g1 ♖d7 26 ♜c5 ♖xc5 0-1 A.Franck-C.Rivaud, Geneva 1991.

7...exd5 8 ♖e3 bxc5

I think this is best, as Black forces a white pawn away from the centre and

secures a protected passed pawn for himself, though GM Sveshnikov could make no impression against the quieter 8...♖a6 either: he tried 9 ♖xa6 ♜xa6 10 ♜a4, but ended up slightly worse as his advanced pawns were weaker than Black's compact structure: 10...♜c8 11 b4 c6 12 ♜e2 ♜c7 13 ♜d1 ♖e7 14 0-0 0-0 15 f4 f5 16 g4 g6 17 ♜g3 ♜e8 18 a4 ♜e6 19 gxf5 gxf5 20 a5 b5 21 ♜a2 ♜h8 22 ♜g2 ♜f7 23 ♜d3 ♖h4 24 ♜e2 ♜g8 25 ♖f2 ♜xg2+ 26 ♜xg2 ♜g8+ 1/2-1/2 E.Sveshnikov-E.Miroshnichenko, Bled 1999.

9 dxc5 c6

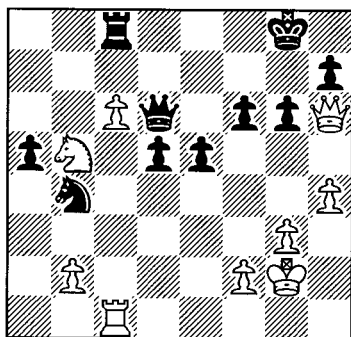


10 ♜d2

10 ♜f3 would transpose to A.Hennings-V.Bagirov, Polanica Zdroj 1969, where Bagirov scored another of his great technical wins: 10...♜a5+ 11 ♜d2 ♜xd2+ 12 ♜xd2 a5 13 ♖d3 ♖a6 14 ♖c2 ♖b7 15 ♖d3 ♜a6 16 ♖xa6 ♖xa6 17 ♜ac1 ♜b8 18 b3 ♖e7 19 ♜d4 g6 20 f4 f6 21 e6 ♜c8 22 exd7+ ♜xd7 23 f5 ♜he8 24 ♜he1 ♜b8 25 g4 ♖f8 26 ♜e6 ♜b4 27 ♜g1 ♜e4 28 ♜ce1 a4 29 ♜c3 ♖e7 30 ♖d4 ♖e2 31 h3 ♜a8 32 b4

♖g8 33 ♙f2 ♜c4+ 34 ♔d2 ♙f3 35 ♘d4 ♙e4 36 a3 ♙f8 37 h4 gxf5 38 gxf5 ♙h6+ 39 ♖e2 ♜e8 40 ♖f1 ♜c3 41 ♖g3 ♜xg3 42 ♙xg3 ♙d3+ 43 ♖f2 ♜xe1 44 ♖xe1 ♙c1 45 ♙f2 ♙xa3 46 ♔d2 ♙c4 47 ♘c2 ♙b2 48 ♙d4 a3 49 ♙c3 ♙b3 50 ♘d4 ♙xc3+ 51 ♙xc3 ♙a4 52 ♘e6 ♙c8 53 ♘d4 ♙b7 54 ♘e6 h6 55 ♘d4 ♙a6 56 ♘e6 a2 57 ♙b2 ♙b5 58 ♙xa2 ♙xb4 59 ♙b2 ♙c4 60 ♘f8 ♙d1 61 ♘d7 ♙g4 62 ♘xf6 ♙xf5 63 ♘g8 ♙e6 0-1

GM Sveshnikov tried 10 ♖a4 here, but soon was at a disadvantage: 10...a5! (correct – Black should normally push the pawn before committing the bishop to a6, as we'll also see in the main game) 11 ♘f3 ♙a6 12 ♜c1 ♙xf1 13 ♖xf1 ♘a6 14 g3 ♜b8 15 ♜c2 ♜b5 16 ♖g2 ♙xc5! 17 a4 ♙xe3 18 axb5 ♘b4 (White must scramble and hope to get some kind of compensation for the pawn) 19 ♜f5 ♙xc1 20 ♜xc1 g6 (I don't see anything at all for White if Black just castles here) 21 ♜h3 0-0 22 ♜h6 f6 23 e6 (hoping for confusion) 23...dxe6 24 ♘d4 ♜d6 25 bxc6 ♜c8 26 h4 e5 27 ♘b5



27...♜b8? (the ever-annoying *Fritz* points out that this logical-seeming move that attacks White's loose knight is a horrible blunder, while the less flashy 27...♜e6 just wins, since Black's kingside is protected and the extra pawn is good enough) 28 h5!! (White gets a huge attack from nowhere, as both 28...g5 29 ♜xf6 and 28...♜xb5 29 hxg6 allow kingside breakthroughs – of course with the queen on e6, 28 h5 would have been meaningless in view of the stolid reply 28...g5, and f6 is held) 28...♜xc6 29 hxg6 ♜b7 30 ♘d6!! ♜g7 (if 30...♜xd6, 31 ♜c8+! wins) 31 gxh7+ ♜xh7 32 ♜xf6 ♜xc1 33 ♜d8+ ♖g7 34 ♜e7+ ♖g6 35 ♜e6+ ♖h5 36 ♜xe5+ ♖g6 37 ♜f5+ ♖h6 38 ♜f6+ ♖h5 39 ♘f5 ♘d3 40 ♘g7+ 1-0 E.Sveshnikov-A.Beletsky, Togliatti 2003.

As in Sergeev's loss (Game 54) White comes up with a tremendous final attack from an objectively lost position – I repeat, don't relax just because you're a good pawn up in the Chase: your opponent is most likely a speculative attacking player, so you must be accurate to the end!

10...♙e7

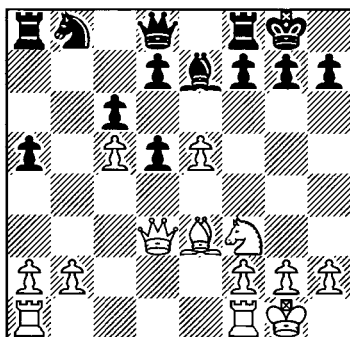
10...a5 is more precise: Black might use this pawn as a battering ram if White goes long; Black also gains space on the queenside. Let's take a look at the critical line: 11 ♙d3 (if White plays more quietly with 11 ♘f3, then 11...♙a6 12 0-0-0 ♙e7 is equal much like the game) 11...♙a6 12 ♙c2 ♙e7 13 0-0-0 0-0 14 ♘f3 a4! (one sees the dif-

ference the unblocked a-pawn makes; Black is threatening ...♙c4 whether or not White takes the pawn) 15 ♙xa4 ♙c4 16 b3 ♖xa4! 17 bxa4 ♘a6 and Black has a tremendous attack.

11 ♘f3 0-0 12 ♙d3 ♙a6 13 0-0

Now White could preserve his bishop and play for an attack himself: 13 ♙c2!, followed by queenside castling, looks surprisingly dangerous despite the seemingly exposed white king. The problem is Black's light-squared bishop which is in the way of his own knight and a-pawn as well. The following variations show the dangers Black faces, and why 10...a5 was correct: 13...f6 (13...♙c4 14 b3 ♙a6 15 0-0-0 ♙b7 is too slow: 16 h4! a5 17 h5 a4 18 ♖d3 g6 19 hxg6 fxg6 20 ♖xh7! and White wins) 14 0-0-0 fxe5 15 ♘xe5 ♙f6 (not 15...d6? 16 ♘xc6!) 16 ♘g4 and White has a strong attack while Black still has not managed to connect his rooks.

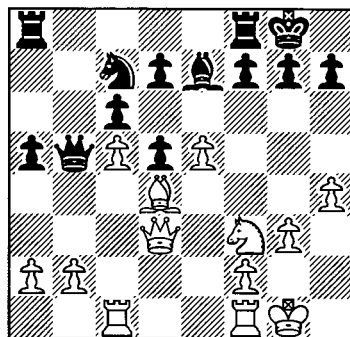
13...♙xd3 14 ♖xd3 a5



Now Black has his proper set-up and has no difficulties, given his protected passed pawn in the centre and safe

king. He will strengthen his position by manoeuvring his knight to the strong post at e6.

15 ♖ac1 ♘a6 16 ♙d4 ♘c7 17 g3 ♖b8 18 h4 ♖b5



19 ♖e3

White should accept the roughly even ending and play 19 ♖xb5 ♘xb5, as there is no attack for White without his light-squared bishop.

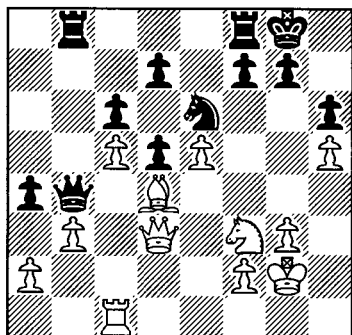
19...♘e6 20 h5 h6 21 ♖c2 ♖ab8 22 ♙g2 ♖a4 23 b3 ♖b4 24 ♖fc1

An oversight, though of course Black is better with ...a5-a4 coming. One sees how crucial this little pawn is to Black's counterplay, and how his game suffers when it's blocked, as could have happened had White played 13 ♙c2.

24...♙g5 25 ♖d3

25 ♘g5 is better, limiting the damage to one pawn, though it's still a clear advantage to Black after 25...♘xd4 26 a3 ♖xa3 27 ♖xd4 hxg5 28 ♖g4 ♖xb3 29 ♖xg5 (or 29 ♖xd7 ♖b7 30 ♖f5 ♖e7 also with an extra button) 29...f6 and Black counter-attacks while keeping his material.

25...♙xc1 26 ♖xc1 a4!



The a-pawn prises open the queen-side files; Black is winning.

27 bxa4 ♗xa4 28 ♖d1 ♗xa2 29 ♗f5 ♖b3 30 g4 ♗e2 0-1

White resigns, since 31 ♖a1 ♖xf3 32 ♗xf3 ♗xf3+ 33 ♙xf3 ♘xd4+ leaves Black a piece up.

Neither Vladimir Sveshnikov nor GM Sveshnikov could get anything against this line – when Black plays correctly! Remember to be accurate and play ...a7-a5 *before* ...♙a6.

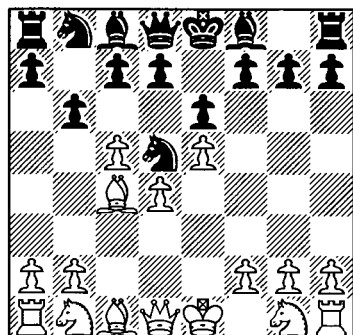
Game 59 D.De Vreugt-P.Egeli Pardubice 2001

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 c4 ♘b6 4 c5 ♘d5 5 ♙c4 e6 6 d4

We see almost the same picture as in the last game, except that White has a bishop on c4 instead of a knight on c3. Evidently this is only a cosmetic difference: once again Black breaks with ...b7-b6 against the overextended c5-

pawn and, at the very least, equalizes the game.

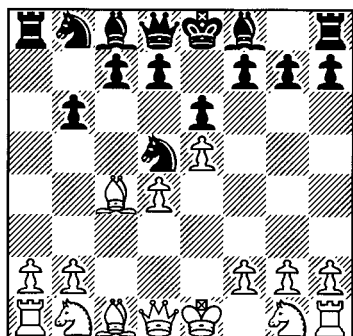
6...b6



7 ♗g4

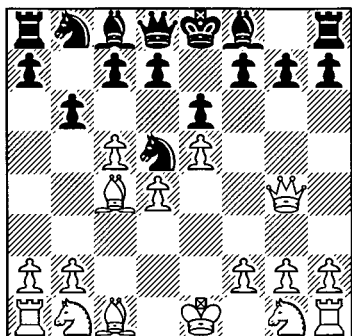
The Dutch GM attempts a wild attack – but can only last to move 20, with White, against a much lower rated opponent!

The unambitious 7 cxb6 is the most popular move and probably also the best, though White only scores 47%, and after 7...axb6 Black obtains a wonderful single island pawn structure and the open a-file;



e.g. 8 ♘c3 (or 8 ♘f3 ♙a6 9 b3 ♙b4+ 10 ♙d2 ♘c6 11 0-0 ♙xd2 12 ♗xd2

♖ce7 and Black was already better with his lock on d5; the reader will not be surprised that Bagirov scored another fine technical win from this position, but not quickly! – eventually 0-1, A.Machulsky-V.Bagirov, Kirovabad 1973) 8...♗xc3 9 bxc3 d5 10 ♕d3 ♕a6 11 ♕xa6 ♖xa6 (Black's typical development in this variation: the white a-pawn is a long-term target) 12 ♖g4 ♖d7 13 ♖e2 ♖c6 14 0-0 ♗d8 (Black intends a king walk to b7, followed by ...g7-g6, ...♕e7, and ...♖ha8 with a great positional advantage; rather than wait for all that World Champion candidate Adorjan throws everything at the black king – but doesn't get through) 15 ♖f4 g6 16 c4 dxc4 17 d5 exd5 18 e6 fxe6 19 ♖xe6+ ♗c8 20 ♕b2 ♖g8 21 ♖fe1 ♕b4 22 ♖e3 ♖d8 23 h3 b5! – the a6-rook enters play and forces the queen exchange, after which Black is just two pawns up. White gave up on his attack and the game: 0-1 A.Adorjan-D.Marovic, Pula 1971.



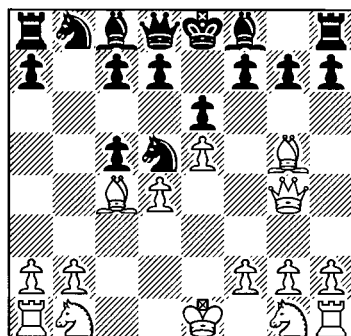
7...bxc5

As usual in the Chase, Black has no

reason not to take the offered c-pawn.

8 ♕g5

8 dxc5 ♖e7 wins a pawn for not much, while 8 ♕xd5 exd5 9 ♕g5 d6! is a typical Alekhine counter-attack – we saw a version of it in the notes to White's 7th move in the previous game. After 10 ♖g3 f6 11 exf6 gxf6 12 ♕e3 cxd4 13 ♕xd4 c5 Black's extra pawn and central control outweigh his slightly breezy king.



8...♖e7

Simpler is 8...f5 9 exf6 (or 9 ♖g3 ♕e7 and Black is just a clean pawn up) 9...♖xf6 and again White has nothing for the pawn.

9 dxc5

White restores the material balance but allows Black to seize the initiative; better is 9 ♖f3 cxd4 10 ♖xd4, when White has some development compensation for the pawn.

9...♖bc6 10 ♖f3 h6 11 ♖h5

It's better just to retreat the bishop with a slightly worse game; e.g. 11 ♕e3 ♖b8 12 b3 ♖b4 (Black can also play simply: 12...♖g6 13 ♖g3 ♕e7 with

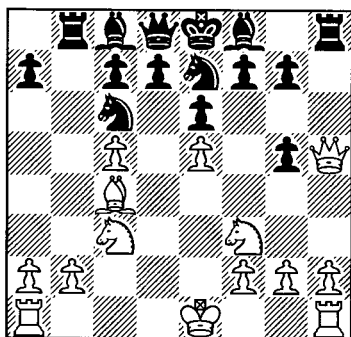
Alekhine Alert!

equality) 13 ♖a3 ♜f5 14 0-0 ♜xe3 15 fxe3, when White has counterplay on the kingside which compensates somewhat for his ragged pawns.

11...♞b8

Black is now attacking across the board, and White has too many obligations to defend effectively.

12 ♜c3 hxg5!!

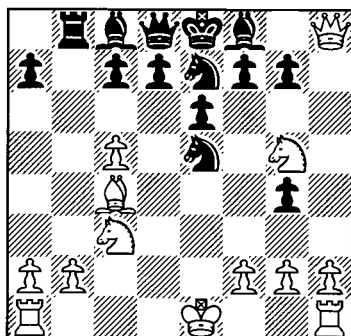


Rather like the famous game E.Geller-M.Euwe, Zürich Candidates 1953, Black offers a rook to lure the white queen away from the main battle; she will never escape her distant corner.

Here's another look at that brilliant game: 1 d4 ♜f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♜c3 ♞b4 4 e3 c5 5 a3 ♞xc3+ 6 bxc3 b6 7 ♞d3 ♞b7 8 f3 ♜c6 9 ♜e2 0-0 10 0-0 ♜a5 11 e4 ♜e8 12 ♜g3 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♞c8 14 f4 ♜xc4 15 f5 f6 16 ♞f4 b5 17 ♞h4 ♞b6 18 e5 ♜xe5 19 fxe6 ♜xd3 20 ♞xd3 ♞xe6 21 ♞xh7+ ♞f7 22 ♞h6 ♞h8!! (a rook is offered just to divert the queen!) 23 ♞xh8 ♞c2 24 ♞c1 ♞xg2+ 25 ♞f1 ♞b3 26 ♞e1 ♞f3 0-1 E.Geller-M.Euwe, Zürich 1953.

13 ♞xh8 g4 14 ♜g5 ♜xe5

The white centre collapses under a typical Alekhine knight attack.



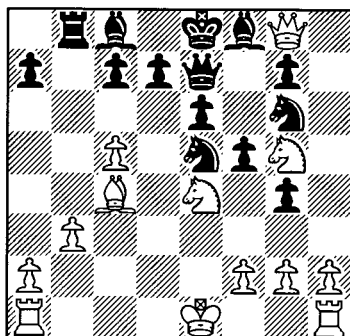
15 ♜ce4

White might as well try the amusing but primitive trap 15 ♜h7!? ♜5g6 (trapping the queen) 16 ♜e4, hoping for 16...♜h8?? 17 ♜hf6+ gxf6 18 ♜xf6 mate! But Black would undoubtedly have found 16...f5, making luft and winning a piece.

15...♜7g6 16 ♞g8

The queen can't get back: if 16 ♞h5 ♜f4 17 ♞h8 (forced) 17...♜xc4 18 ♜h7 ♞e7 and Black is a piece up.

16...♞e7 17 b3 f5!



Now White's artificial position must collapse.

18 0-0 fxe4 19 ♖xe4 ♔h4 20 ♚fe1 ♘e7 0-1

The "attacking" white queen is trapped and lost.

So one can beat a GM with Black in 20 moves with Alekhine's Defence – but probably not against the rather better 4 ♘f3!.

Summary

The Chase Variation remains dodgy, to put it mildly. The statistics are poor, *Fritz* is unimpressed, and it's easy to play against. As much as there is a main line, it appears that White

doesn't have anything better than the old pawn sacrifice seen in Games 54-57 (one recalls that White won one of those four games, drew two, and lost one for an even score). Although White doesn't get much of anything from a theoretical standpoint, he does have practical chances, as Sergeev found out to his misfortune, and Black must not assume that one pawn up automatically equals victory.

The Alekhine player should familiarize himself with Korchnoi's counter-attack and the ...b7-b6 break seen in the last two games. With that basic knowledge, you can face the Chase without fear.

Chapter Eight

Fourth or Fifth Move Sidelines

Our Hero: Rafael Vaganian

In this chapter we'll cover a few "almost a variation" lines, in the sense that "if it's almost a sport, it's on the ocho!" These occur on move 4 or 5 when White doesn't know or want to know a main line – or else he thinks, "Why play something good, I can beat this Alekhine junk with anything!"

In reality none of these should cause the slightest problem, as long as one is prepared! We'll look at (after 1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6):

a) 4 ♙c4 (Games 60 and 61). The first of these games brings back our favourite "Lines I Don't Like", while the second shows the correct way to battle this innocuous system – think outside the box! Think outside Alekhine's Defence! Yes, this chapter's hero, Rafael Vaganian, will show you an excellent

transposition to the French! After all, as Joseph Heller said, "Consistency is an overrated virtue!"

b) 4 ♘e2 (Game 62). This hardly deserves a special game as it basically transposes to Chapter Two; nonetheless I give a quick review and a look at this particular move order.

c) 4 f4 (Game 63). Tal demolished this in Game 7, but I'll show how White might approach equality with a better move order.

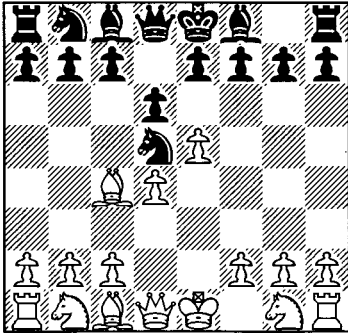
d) 4 c4 ♘b6 5 ♘f3 (Game 64). This introduces a gambit that Alekhine played with success against his own defence, but it's much simpler to stick within our repertoire and completely avoid such tricks – I'll show you how to defuse this gambit, Kengis style.

And now, without further ado:

Lines I Don't Like

Game 60
A.Kislinsky-R.Ivanukh
 Kharkov 2009

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♙c4



Another deviation is 4 exd6 exd6, most likely with a transposition to Chapter Five, which shouldn't terrify anyone – but Black even has extra options here, as his centralized knight can retreat to f6 instead of b6.

4...♘b6

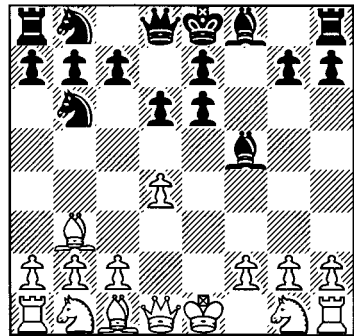
Natural and best; 4...dxe5 5 dxe5 ♘b6 6 ♙xf7+ is very possibly worse for Black.

5 ♙b3

Black must now make a critical decision. All five of my Alekhine books give either 5...dxe5 or 5...♙f5 as the main move. Indeed, these are the “Alekhine Defence” moves – but they are also, in my opinion, objectively inferior. In both cases White gets a terrific attack and scores very high in the

database. I don't like the main game with 5...dxe5 because, as we'll see, White gets a powerful attacking position right out of the opening with 6 ♖h5, and indeed scores 59% after that move.

I don't like 5...♙f5 any better: the Icelandic GM Thorhallssen has had great success with the obstructive sac e5-e6 here (so often strong vs. the Alekhine) and I see no reason to submit to such a painful defence. Note also that a check of the database after 6 e6 reveals that White scores 63%! Here are a couple of discouraging looks at Thorhallssen wins with 6 e6 fxe6 and then:



a) 7 a4 a5 8 ♘f3 ♘c6 9 0-0 ♖d7 10 ♜e1 0-0-0 11 ♘g5 (White is already clearly better: Black sacs the exchange to keep e6 from collapsing, but never gets sufficient compensation) 11...d5 12 ♘f7 ♜g8 13 ♘xd8 ♖xd8 14 c3 g5 15 ♙c2 g4 16 ♙f4 ♘c4 17 ♘a3 ♘d6 18 ♘b5 ♘b8 19 ♙d3 ♙g7 20 ♘xd6 cxd6 21 ♙xf5 exf5 22 ♖b3 ♖c6 23 ♜e6 (the fatal square!) 1-0 T.Thorhallsson-S.Schneider, Copenhagen 1995.

b) An earlier game led to the following dramatic bind: 7 f3 d7 8 0-0 c6 9 a4 a5 10 a2 xa4 11 g5 d5 12 b3 xb3 13 cxb3 b6 14 f4 h6 15 f3 g4 16 d3 xf3 17 xf3 c8 18 e1 d6 19 h5+ d8 20 g6 f5 21 d2 xd4 22 f3 xf3+ 23 gxf3 e5 24 xe5 a5 25 e6 c6 26 b4 a4 27 e3 a6 28 c1 (Black is two pawns up, but still can't free himself from the blockade at e6, the epicentre of the obstructive sac) 28... d4 29 d1 dx e3 30 xd7+ xd7 31 xe3 c5 32 d3+ c7 33 e8 d6 34 c3 d1+ 35 g2 e6 36 bxc5 g5 37 c6 1-0 T.Thorhallsson-G.Sigurjonsson, Icelandic Team Ch. 1994.

Black does have another move: safe, objectively sound, and White can't even manage 50% against it – see the next game for the solution.

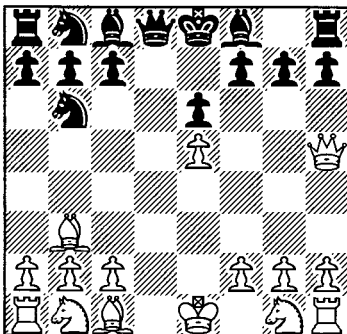
5... dx e5 6 h5

This zwischenzug is White's point, forcing Black over to a painful defence.

6... e6

6... g6 7 xe5 f6 8 e3 is also unpleasant.

7 dx e5



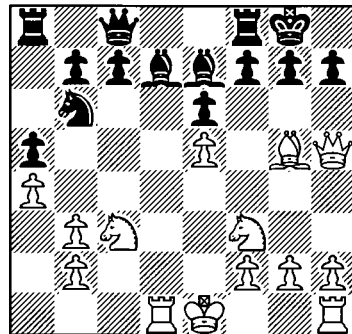
This is the kind of pawn wedge position we discussed in Chapter Two. If White can get this attacking set-up without any opposing counterplay, he stands better, as here.

7... a5 8 a4 a6

The idea of this manoeuvre is to exchange the b3-bishop and weaken White's pawn structure, but this doesn't help if you get mated in the meantime!

I'm not saying Black loses by force here; it's just that White's game is so easy to play (look at his next three moves: all logical development that prepares an attack), while Black must resort to convoluted manoeuvres just to stay in the game.

9 c3 c5 10 g5 e7 11 d1 d7 12 e3 xb3 13 cxb3 0-0 14 f3 c8 15 g5



15... $\text{xg5}?!$

Bringing the white knight into the attack can't be right. Black had two better tries: 15... f6 16 exf6 xf6 and 15... e8 16 h4 xg5 17 xg5 h6 18 ge4 . White gets a plus equals from

Mr. Fritz in both cases, but given what happens in the game, Black should be delighted to be slightly worse!

16 ♖xg5

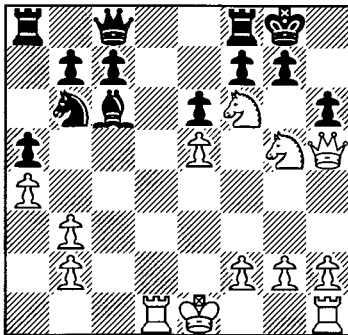
It's possible that even now Black may not be completely lost.

16...h6 17 ♖ce4 ♙c6?

Black also loses by force after 17...♙d8? 18 ♖f6+! gxf6 19 ♖e4 f5 20 ♙d3 fxe4 21 ♙g3+ ♙g5 (or 21...♙h7 22 ♙h3 and mates) 22 ♙xh6! ♙g6 (if 22...♙xg3 23 hxg3 and mate next move) 23 ♙xg6+ fxg6 24 ♙xg6+ ♙h8 25 h4 and White has a winning attack.

But there is a defence! 17...♖d5! (the only move) 18 ♖f6+ ♖xf6! (but not 18...gxf6? 19 ♙xh6 fxg5 20 ♙xg5+ ♙h8 21 ♙d4 and mates) 19 exf6 e5 20 fxg7 ♙xg7 21 ♖f3 and Black is only a little worse – success!

18 ♖f6+!



The white e-pawn wedge supports the decisive attack, while Black's sole bishop (on light squares) has no defensive value as the attack takes place on the dark squares.

18...gxf6

If 18...♙h8 19 ♙xf7! wins, as neither the queen nor either knight can be taken, and White threatens both 20 ♙g6 and 20 ♙g8+!.

19 exf6 1-0

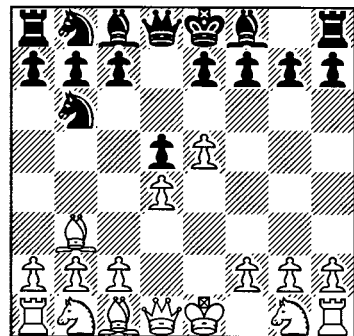
Black resigns short of move 20, as after 19...♖d5 20 ♙xd5 exd5 21 ♙xh6 ♙e8+ 22 ♖f1 Black has no more good checks, and will soon run out of bad ones; e.g. 22...♙b5+ 23 axb5 ♙e1+ 24 ♖xe1 ♙e8+ 25 ♖d2 ♙e2+ 26 ♖xe2 ♙e8+ 27 ♖d2 ♙e2+ 28 ♖xe2 and mate follows.

Maybe Black could have held the plus equals position he could have reached on move 15, but I just can't see the allure of that course, when there is something so much simpler and better...

Game 61

R.Messa-R.Vaganian
Reggio Emilia 1981/82

1 e4 ♖f6 **2** e5 ♖d5 **3** d4 d6 **4** ♙c4 ♖b6 **5** ♙b3 d5!



Alekhine Alert!

Correct! White only scores 48% against this.

When White played 4 ♟c4 , he clearly aimed at a direct kingside attack – but now the bishop is in a ridiculous position, while the black knight is ready for French queenside play. There are many reasons to go French: Leslie Caron, Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve to name a few, and now Vaganian gives us one more!

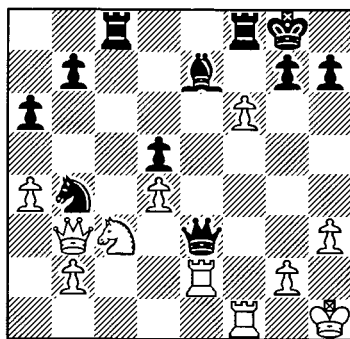
6 ♞d2

White has other tries here, but nothing scary: Black's solid French structure and the misplaced bishop on b3 show that Black is already equal. Here are a few examples:

a) 6 a4 (this threatens nothing) 6... e6 7 ♞f3 (if 7 a5 ♞d6 7 8 c3 5 9 ♞f3 ♞c6 and Black has normal French play, while the white a-pawn is now a weakness) 7... c5 8 c3 ♞c6 9 O-O cxd4 10 cxd4 ♟e7 11 ♞c3 ♞b4 12 ♟e2 a6 13 ♟f4 ♟d7 14 ♞d1 ♞c8 15 ♞d2 h5 16 ♞f3 ♞a7 17 ♟d2 ♞ac6 (Black cements his grip on the weak b4-square) 18 ♟g5 f6 19 exf6 gxf6 20 ♟h4 ♟b6 21 ♞e3 O-O-O 22 ♟fc1 ♟b8 23 ♟d1 (White finally tries to do something with his light-squared bishop, but only spends more moves to exchange it without affecting the position) 23... ♟a8 24 ♟c3 ♟dg8 25 h3 ♟d8 26 ♟e2 ♟f8 27 ♟h1 ♟d6 28 ♟b5 ♟b8 29 ♟xc6 ♞xc6 30 ♞f1 ♟a8 31 ♟b3 (White has run out of gas on the queenside; now it's time for the kingside counter-attack) 31... ♟g7 32 ♞e1 f5 33 ♟d1 f4 34 g3 ♞e7 35 ♟xe7 ♟xe7 36

♟a1 fxg3 37 fxg3 e5 38 dxe5 ♟xe5 39 ♞f3 ♟f5 40 ♞g1 d4! (Black's bishops are unleashed) 41 ♟f3 ♟c6 42 ♟g2 ♟d7 0-1 J.Hickl-K.Bischoff, Dortmund 1987.

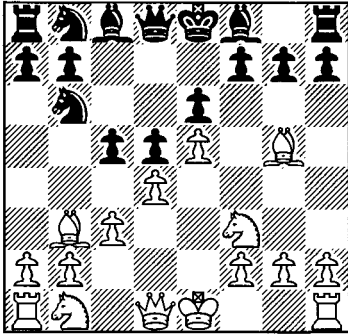
b) 6 ♞e2 e6 7 O-O c5 8 c3 ♟d7 9 a4 ♞c6 10 ♟h1 cxd4 11 cxd4 ♞b4 12 ♞bc3 ♞c4 13 f4 ♞a5 (White's next looks threatening, but Shamkovich keeps his cool) 14 f5 (or 14 ♟e3 ♞xb3 15 ♟xb3 g6 with equality) 14... ♞xb3 15 fxe6 (15 ♟xb3 exf5 16 ♞xd5? ♟e6 wins for Black) 15... ♟xe6 16 ♟xb3 ♟e7 17 ♞f4 O-O 18 ♟e3 ♟c8 19 ♟f2 ♟d7 20 ♟af1 a6 21 h3 f6 (Black has counter-play) 22 ♞xe6 ♟xe6 23 exf6 (23 ♟f4 is easier, with approximate equality) 23... ♟xe3 24 ♟e2? (24 ♟f3 is correct)



24... ♟xc3! (a great counterblow!) 25 ♟xe3 ♟xb3 26 ♟xb3 (if 26 fxe7 ♟xf1+ 27 ♟h2 ♟xe3 and there is no new queen!) 26... ♟xf6 27 ♟e1 ♟d6 28 g4 ♟f7 29 ♞g2 g5! (Black has consolidated his position and wins technically) 30 ♟ee3 a5 31 ♟f3 ♟f4 32 ♟fc3 ♟e6 33 ♟c5 b6 34 ♟c8 ♟e2+ 35 ♟f1 ♟d2 36 ♟h8 ♞g7 37 ♟e8 ♟xd4 38 ♟e6 ♟d1+ 39

♖e2 ♜d2+ 40 ♖f1 d4 41 ♜xb6 ♙e3 0-1
N.Vulicevic-L.Shamkovich, New York
1992.

c) 6 c3 e6 7 ♜f3 c5 8 ♙g5

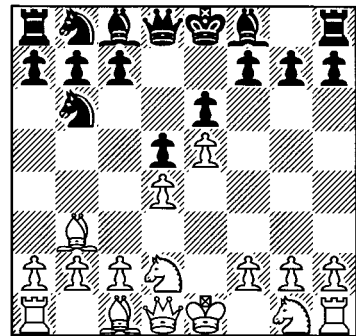


(the game actually reached this position via an Alapin Sicilian) 8...♙c7 (I think 8...♙e7 is simpler as White's "good" bishop is rather bad, so one doesn't mind exchanging the other one – but I must admit that, while Black has to defend for a while after the game move, when he finally counter-attacks, that carefully preserved dark-squared bishop becomes very strong) 9 0-0 ♜c6 10 ♞e2 h6 11 ♙e3 c4 12 ♙c2 ♙d7 13 b4 a6 14 ♜bd2 ♜e7 15 a4 ♜f5 16 ♙f4 g5 17 ♙g3 ♜xg3 18 fxg3 0-0-0 19 ♜fb1 ♖b8 20 ♜f1 ♙e7 21 ♜e3 h5 22 a5 ♜c8 23 ♞d1 ♜a7 24 ♞d2 ♜dg8 25 ♜f1 g4 26 ♜h4 ♙e8 27 ♙a4 (White's attack has burned out and he can't find anything better than exchanging his "good" bishop – but now Black's remaining cleric takes over the game) 27...♙xa4 28 ♙xa4 ♙g5! 29 ♞f2 ♜b5 30 ♜d1 ♜f8 31 ♜a2 ♜hg8 32 ♞e1 ♞e7 33 ♜b2 ♖a7 34 ♜a4 f6 35 exf6 ♜xf6 36

♜xf6 ♙xf6 37 ♜b6 ♞g7 38 ♞xe6 ♜xc3 39 ♜f5 ♙xd4+ (this looks like a winning Kengis as Black crashes through on the long dark diagonal!) 40 ♖h1 ♞e5 41 ♞xe5 ♙xe5 42 ♜f2 ♜d8 43 ♜e7 ♙d4 44 ♜c2 ♙e8 45 ♜bc8+ ♖b8 46 ♜c1 ♜xc8 47 ♜xc8 ♖xc8 48 h3 ♙d7 49 hxg4 hxg4 0-1 G.Sturc-J.Janos, Tatranske Matliare 2007.

6...e6

6...♙f5 is possible, but I prefer Vaganian's solid French set-up, completely blunting the white bishop, which now wonders why it ever wandered to b3!



7 ♜e2

If White tries to free his light-squared bishop with 7 c4 dxc4 8 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 9 ♙xc4, he has to give up castling after 9...♙b4+ 10 ♖f1, as 10 ♙d2 ♞xd4 picks off a pawn.

7...c5 8 c3 ♙d7 9 ♜f3

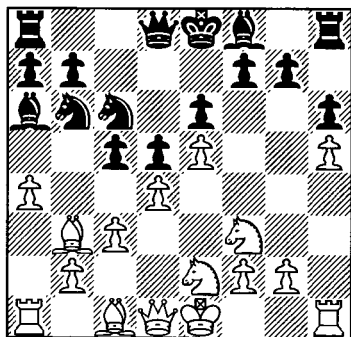
9 0-0 ♙b5! is similar: 10 ♜f3 ♜c6 11 ♜e1 ♙xe2 12 ♞xe2 cxd4 13 cxd4 ♙e7 14 ♙c2 g5! 15 ♙e3 ♜c4 16 b3 ♜xe3 17 fxe3 ♞b6 18 ♜ac1 ♙a3 19 ♜cd1 h6 20 ♜f1 0-0-0 21 ♜d2 ♜df8 22 ♜b1 ♙e7 23

Alekhine Alert!

♖c3 ♖b8 24 ♖a4 ♜b4, and after all this sharp play, with Black about to break with ...f7-f6 – a draw was agreed, ½-½ E.Liitaiainen-P.Pakarinen, Tampere 1998.
9...♙b5

Very rare in the French, but here Black's "bad" light-squared bishop is stronger than White's "good" one!

Of course the simple 9...♖c6 is also possible: Black has a good game with his queenside knights, while White's light-squared bishop is still not playing.
10 h4 ♖c6 11 h5 h6 12 a4 ♙a6



13 dxc5

13 0-0 cxd4 14 cxd4 ♙e7 is slightly better for Black, as White has weaknesses on both wings and no attack.

13...♖d7 14 ♙f4 ♙xc5 15 ♙c2

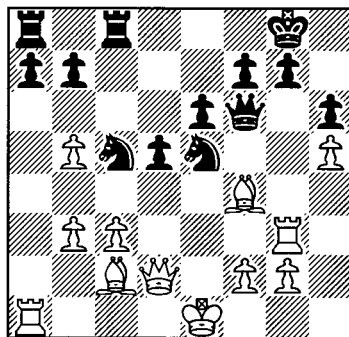
The errant bishop finally reaches a reasonable square!

15...♙b6 16 ♖ed4 ♙xd4 17 ♖xd4

This looks unsound to me, but White is trying to generate some play. On the natural 17 cxd4 ♜b6 18 ♜d2, Black doesn't need to take the b-pawn (though that is possible) but can get a larger positional advantage with

18...♜c8. Black's queenside play increases, while White has nothing much on the other wing.

17...♖cxе5 18 ♖b5 0-0 19 ♜h3 ♜f6 20 ♜d2 ♜fc8 21 b3 ♙xb5 22 axb5 ♖c5 23 ♜g3



Now Black can just play the solid 23...♙h8, when it's hard to see any compensation for White's missing pawn – but Vaganian has something much more imaginative in mind.

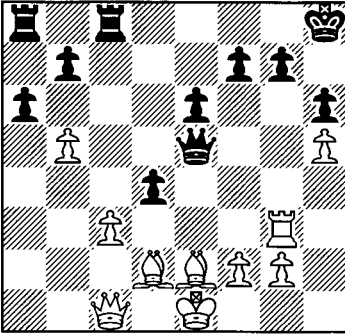
23...♖ed3+! 24 ♙xd3 ♖xb3

Black transforms his material advantage of one plain pawn up into rook + two pawns vs. two bishops. I remember losing a similar position to GM Walter Browne years ago: the problem White has (I couldn't solve it either) is that the two bishops can't cooperate to defend any single square, so it's hard to blockade the black pawns.

25 ♜b2 ♖xa1 26 ♙d2 ♜e5+ 27 ♙e2 ♙h8 28 ♜xa1 a6 29 ♜c1

29 bxa6 ♜xa6 is better, even though it activates the black rook, since Vaganian would then have to work to create passed pawns.

29...d4!



This is precisely calculated: Vaganian allows, then refutes, the coming sac.

30 ♖xh6 ♜xc3 31 ♜xc3

White has no choice, for if 31 ♖xg7+? ♜xg7 32 ♜xg7 ♜xc1+ and Black emerges with an extra exchange and an easily winning ending – but now Black gets a passed pawn on the sixth.

31...dxc3 32 ♖f4 ♜d4 33 ♖e3 ♜b4 34 h6

Losing quickly, but even after 34 bxa6 bxa6 35 ♜f1 a5 it's impossible to see how White stops the onrushing pawns.

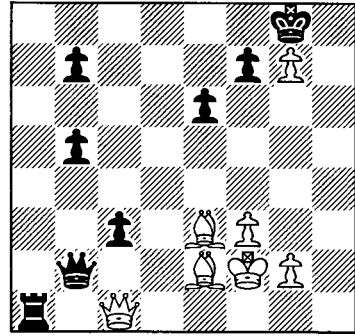
34...axb5 35 hxg7+ ♔g8 36 f3 ♜b2 37 ♜f2

If 37 ♜xb2 cxb2 and one sees the “bishop non-cooperation” in a nutshell: only one bishop can control the queening square, and that one will be quickly picked off by the black rook.

37...♚a1 0-1

White resigns in view of 38 ♜xb2 cxb2 39 ♖d3 ♜d1 40 ♖e4 ♔g7 41 ♔e2

b1 ♜ 42 ♖b1 ♜b1 and Black comes out an exchange and two pawns to the good.



This line is so simple and clear that little discussion is needed: just shift to a French with a bad white king's bishop!

Game 62

O.Romanishin-S.Palatnik

Kislovodsk 1982

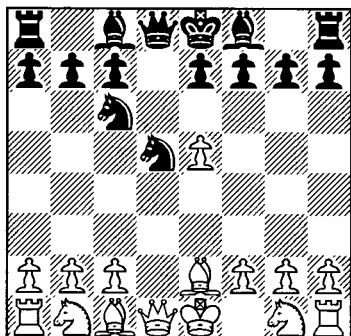
1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♖e2

Basically leading to Chapter Two – but for completeness I will show one game featuring this move order. Romanishin has played this line with some success, though such quiet development is harmless against reasonable play.

4...dxe5

With the white bishop so passively placed there is no reason not to take, as here (unlike in Game 60) Black has a quick counter-attack against e5.

5 dxe5 ♘c6



6 f3

6 f4 is a solid defence to the e-pawn, but White falls way behind in development. After 6...f5 7 a3 b6 8 f3 xxd1+ 9 exd1 e6 Black already had a sizeable advantage in A.Pajer-J.Jambrich, Bratislava 1995.

6 c4 db4 is also good for Black, as in Game 12.

6...g4

In a note to Game 12 (reached by the move order 4 f3 dxe5 5 dxe5 g4), I point out that “Black should have no problems against the mild 6 e2” – and he doesn’t!

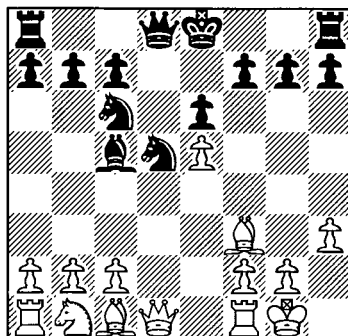
7 h3

Romanishin has also tried 7 c3 db6 8 bd2 e6 9 O-O e7 10 a4 a5 11 e1 O-O 12 b3 d5 but Black easily equalized; and then after 13 b5 fd8 14 f1, instead of the adventurous 14...e4 of O.Romanishin-G.Agzamov, Frunze 1985, Black could have obtained a comfortable position with 14...a7! forcing a favourable queen exchange, as the white e-pawn is somewhat weak and there is no compensating attack

once the queens are gone.

7...xf3 8 xf3 e6 9 O-O c5

Not 9...xe5?? 10 xd5 exd5 (10...xd5 11 xd5 exd5 12 e1 is the same) 11 e1 f6 12 f4 and White wins a piece.



10 c3

Now Black threatens to take the e-pawn, and because of the pin on the a7-g1 diagonal, White will not have f2-f4 when he needs it. Since all the defences of the pawn have their drawbacks, Romanishin sacs it – but just barely draws. Here’s a quick look at the defences:

a) 10 e1 Wh4 is good for Black, as White obviously can’t defend with 11 g3.

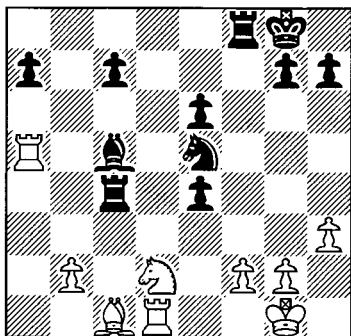
b) 10 e2 d4 is at least equal for Black.

c) 10 c3 is perhaps best, as after 10...xc3 11 bxc3 dxe5 12 xb7 xd1 13 xd1 b8 14 b1 O-O the ending is about even, since Black’s extra pawn on the kingside is compensated for by White’s two bishops.

10...xe5 11 c4 db4 12 xb7 xd1 13

14...xc4 15 a3 d5 16

15 a3 fxe4 16 axb4 xb4 17 a5 xc4
18 d2 0-0!



19 dxe4

If 19 dxc4 xf2+ 20 h2 dxc4 and Black has more than enough for the exchange.

19...d4

19...d4 is extremely complicated, but may lead to a draw anyway: 20 b3 c2 21 a3 d6 22 xf8 xa5 23 xd4 xf8 24 g5 xb3 25 d7 and White's seventh rank play should hold the game despite Black's passed pawns.

20 f1

Not 20 e1? b4 forking.

20...xe4

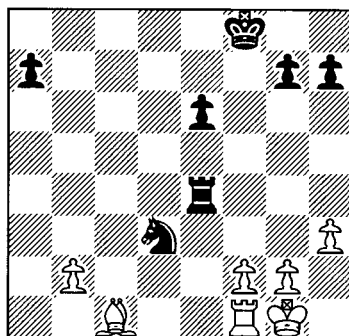
Despite the extra pawn, there don't seem to be any wins; e.g. 20...d6 21 dxd6 cxd6 22 xa7 b8 23 e3 ddb4 24 f4 d4 25 d4 d2 26 xg7+ f8 27 c1 xd4 28 cc7 xxf4 29 xh7 and White just barely draws, a piece down

– but he does draw!

21 xc5 d3

Probably the simplest: Black forces the draw as his pawns are too weak to play realistically for a win. After 21...c6 22 f3 e2 23 d1 White would have continued compensation.

22 xc7 f7 23 c8+ f8 24 xf8+ xf8



25 e3

Or 25 b3 dxc1 26 xc1 b4 with a drawn ending.

25...xb2

Nothing exciting occurs for the rest of the game.

26 b1 d3 27 a1 c4 28 xa7 f4 29 a5

29 f1 d5 30 d2 c7 etc is another draw.

29...d5 30 c5+ f7 31 g3 h5 32 h4 f6 33 a3 g5 34 hxg5+ xg5 35 e7+ g6 36 h4 c8 37 g2 b8 38 a7 c8 39 d7 a8 40 b7 f6 41 b5 d5 42 b2 f5 43 h3 c8 44 a2 b8 45 a7 g6 46 e7 xe7 47 xe7 f6 48 a7 1/2-1/2

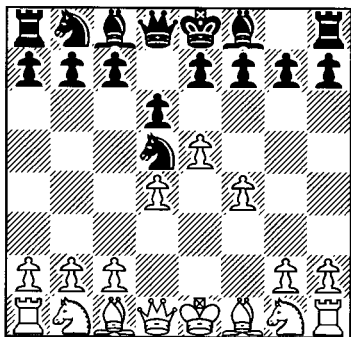
There's not much to say about this

Alekhine Alert!

mild variation – Black has no difficulties as long as he counter-attacks quickly against the e5-pawn. Note that even Romanishin, whose pet line this was, could only struggle for a draw against a prepared opponent.

Game 63 J.Pelikian-G.Milos Sao Paulo 2004

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 f4



This inoffensive line allows Black to break up White's centre with ease.

4...dxe5 5 fxe5

As I mentioned in the notes to Game 7, the anti-positional 5 dxe5 has done terribly for White since 1926, and the variation has not improved with age! Here's a modern example: 5 dxe5 ♙f5 6 ♙d3 (6 c4 ♘b4 is also good for Black) 6...♙xd3 7 ♖xd3 e6 8 ♘f3 (worse is 8 ♖b5+ ♘c6 9 ♖xb7? ♘db4 10 ♘a3 ♖b8 and Black wins the queen) 8...c6 9 c4 ♘b4 10 ♖xd8+ ♙xd8 11 ♘a3 ♙c5 12 ♙e2 ♘d7 13 ♙e3 ♙e7, when Black was

slightly better in view of his more compact pawns in J.Gutierrez-T.Heinrich, Bad Zwosten 1998.

5...c5

White scores a miserable 41% from this position, and it's not surprising – as I pointed out in Chapter One, Black has the only developed piece and an attack in the centre.

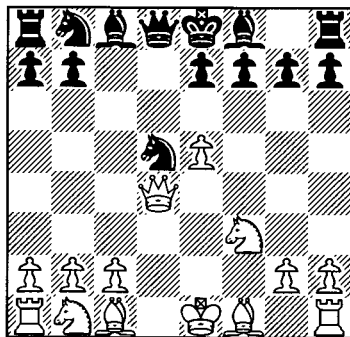
6 ♘f3

One recalls 6 c4? ♘b4 7 d5 ♙f5 when Tal was already better in Game 7.

6...cxd4

So much for White's "three pawn" centre – only one is left, and that one is isolated.

7 ♖xd4

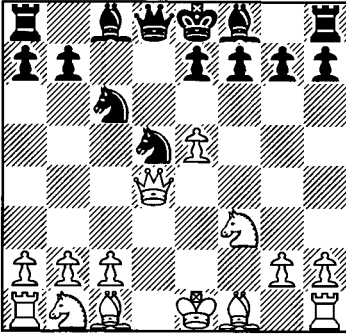


7...♘c6

Cox's 7...♙f5 looks like a more accurate move order, as after 7...♘c6 White can prevent the bishop's development with 8 ♖e4, which led to a disaster for Black in the following game: 8...g6 9 ♙c4 ♘b6 10 ♙b3 ♙g7 11 0-0 ♙f5 12 ♖f4 0-0 13 ♘c3 ♖b8 14 ♖e1 ♘d7 15 e6!, and with this characteristic anti-Alekhine blow White took over the ad-

vantage and went on to win in V.Kupreichik-Z.Varga, European Team Ch., Debrecen 1992.

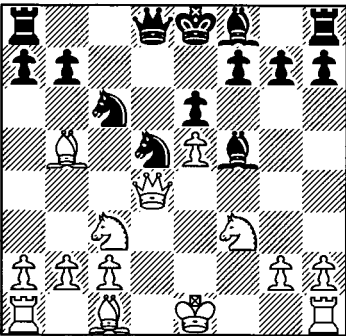
After the correct 7...♙f5, 8 ♘c3 (8 c4 ♖a5+ 9 ♙d2 ♘b4 is good for Black) 8...e6 9 ♙b5+ ♘c6 transposes back to the main game.



8 ♙b5

As seen above, 8 ♖e4 is stronger here.

8...♙f5 9 ♘c3 e6



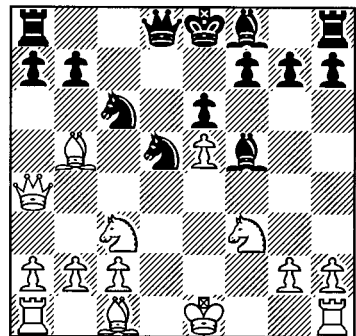
10 ♖a4?

White has to play extremely accurately just to get through the opening alive – a case in point is this seemingly natural move that just loses a pawn!

He has two better tries:

a) 10 ♙g5 (now it's White who comes out a pawn ahead in most lines, but Black has so much active play that the material doesn't give any advantage, and White has to be careful) 10...♖b6 11 ♘xd5 exd5 12 ♖xd5 (Black's initiative persists into the endgame: if 12 ♖xb6 axb6 13 0-0-0 ♙c5 14 ♖xd5 h6 15 ♙h4 0-0 and the open lines give him excellent play for the pawn) 12...♙c5 and Black has great play against White's wide open king. Moving three pawns forward in the opening is good if you attack, but if pushed onto the defensive, as here, the open spaces left behind can be highways for the opposing pieces.

b) 10 ♘xd5 (possibly best) 10...♖xd5 11 ♖xd5 exd5 12 c3 a6 13 ♙e2 ♙c5 14 ♙f4 0-0 15 0-0-0 ♙e4 16 ♙d3 and White may be able to equalize.



10...♘db4!

Snap! Note the recurring ...♘b4 theme, also seen in the Tal game.

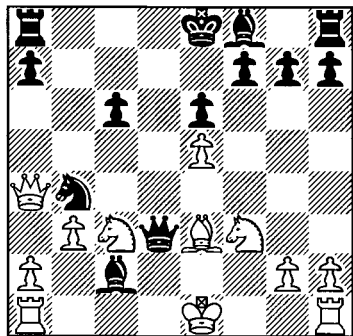
11 ♙xc6+

11 ♙g5 ♙xc2 12 ♙xd8 ♙xa4 13

Alekhine Alert!

♖xa4 ♜xd8 keeps the damage to a single (albeit decisive) pawn, when the game would undoubtedly last longer!

11...bxc6 12 ♙e3 ♙xc2 13 b3 ♜d3!



The queen invasion is decisive.

14 ♙d4 ♙e7 15 a3 ♙xb3 16 ♜xb3 ♖c2+ 17 ♙f2 ♖xd4 18 ♜ad1

Black also wins after 18 ♜b7 0-0 19 ♜xe7 ♜c2+ 20 ♙f1 ♜xc3 21 ♜e1 ♖xf3.

18...♜xf3+ 0-1

While this game and Tal's opening devastation from Game 7 might mark the 4 f4 line as completely unplayable for White, one sees that with 10 ♙g5 or 10 ♖xd5 White could approach equality, or at least 41% of it!

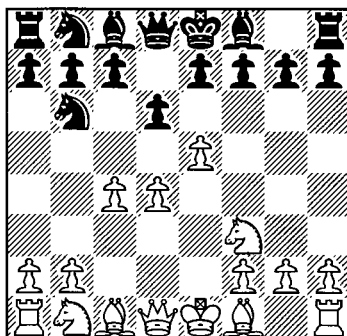
However, Black should remember to play the Cox move order with 7...♙f5, rather than allow Kupreichik's (7...♖c6) 8 ♜e4.

Game 64 G.Dunlop-S.Fitzpatrick Perth, Australia 1994

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 d4 d6

When Alekhine was confronted (quite cheekily, I might add!) with his own defence during his first World Championship match with Dr. Euwe, he improvised a very interesting attacking idea, which he afterwards improved to great effect against Reshevsky a few years later.

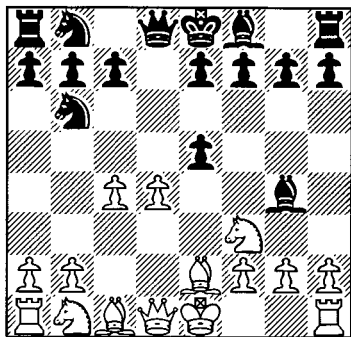
4 c4 ♖b6 5 ♖f3



The start of this tricky attacking scheme – and yet completely harmless to the modern Alekhine player, as one can transpose into a smooth Kengis, which I must point out again is absolutely essential to know. (Note that the Alekhine-Reshevsky game given below started out with a slightly different move order: 4 ♖f3 ♙g4 5 c4 ♖b6 and then transposed into a variation of the main game – but I don't recommend the 4...♙g4 line for Black anyway, as I already explained in Game 11!)

Now back to the Alekhine's anti-Alekhine! There are two branches: first, against Dr. Euwe, after 5...♙g4 6 ♙e2 dxe5, he tried 7 c5!? with unclear complications, which in the game below

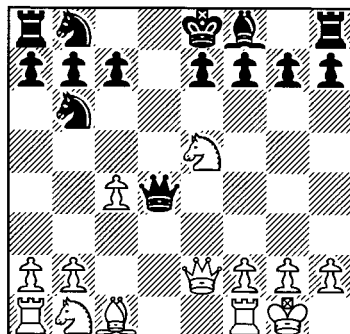
finally turn in White's favour; second, against Reshevsky, Mr. A unleashed the even more dangerous 7 dxe5! , sacrificing the d-pawn for attack. Here's a quick look at these historic games:



a) 7 c5!? e4 8 cxb6 exf3 9 fx3 fx3 10 xf3 axb6 (Alekhine himself recommended 10... dxc6 with counterplay) 11 xb7 d7 12 f4 e5 13 xe5 dxe5 14 dxe5 b4+ 15 dxc3 xc3+ 16 bxc3 0-0 17 0-0 we7 18 f1e1 wc5 19 e3 a3 20 wf3 e8 21 h3 a5 22 d1 we7 23 wc6 c5 24 wd7 g6 25 f4 c4 26 xe7 xe7 27 d4 c5 28 f2 c6 29 a4 a7 30 b4 b5 31 axb5 cxb5 32 cf3 ac7 33 b3 f8 34 g4 (as Alekhine points out, 34 g3! followed by a king march to d2, freeing one rook, should win for White – the impetuous g2-g4 and coming f4-f5 allows a surprising counter) 34... e7 35 f5 gxf5 36 gxf5 f6! (refuting White's too quick pawn advance in counter-attacking "Alekhine" style!) 37 f4 fxe5+ 38 fxe5+ fxe5 39 xe5 c5+ 40 e4 xf6 41 a3 c4+ 42 d3 h4 43 b3 xf5 44 xb5+ e6 45 c4 hx3+ 46 d4 d6 47 b6+ c7

48 f6 h5 49 c3 b7 50 b4 c7 1/2-1/2 A.Alekhine-M.Euwe, Netherlands (29th matchgame) 1935, in view of 50... c7 51 a6 g5 52 a7+ (or 52 c5 g6) 52... b8 53 hx7 g6 54 c5 c8 55 b5 f6 with the well-known Philidor draw.

b) 7 dxe5! xe2 8 xe2 xd4 9 0-0



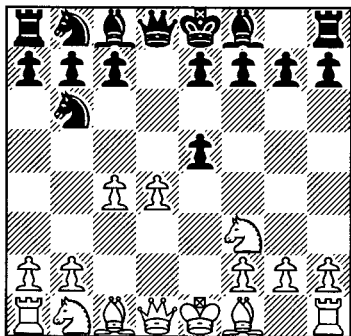
(White has an attack for a pawn) 9... d8d7 10 dxd7 dxd7 11 d3 c6 12 e3 we5 13 ad1 e6 14 wf3 0-0-0 15 xa7 wa5 16 d4 wf5 17 wg3 e5 18 e3 b4 19 d4 a5 20 f4 c7 21 b3 f6 22 fxe5 we6 23 h3 (foreseeing $\text{wh2!?$) 23... hgh8 24 d4 dxe5 25 wc3 d7 26 c5 ge8 27 b4 db8 28 db6+ xb6 29 cxb6 xa2 30 wg3 d7 31 c5 wf7 32 a1 wg6 33 wh2! (setting the stage for the following brilliant combination) 33... e5 34 a8 d2? (White to play and win!) 35 xb8+! xb8 36 xe5+! 1-0 A.Alekhine-S.Reshevsky, Kemerli 1937.

5... dxe5!

Correct from both an objective and repertoire standard. The most popular move in the database is 5... dxe5! , but I

Alekhine Alert!

see absolutely no reason to play it and submit oneself to the above presented Alekhine attacks. The text avoids both, with no disadvantage to Black.

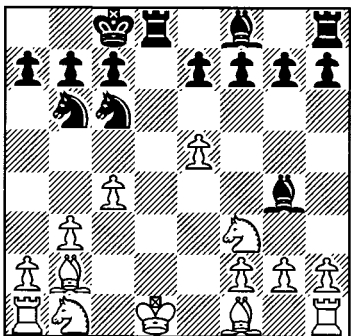


6 dxe5?!

Black gets a good game after the coming queen exchange. Also if 6 c5 ♖6d7 7 dxe5 e6 and White has no good defence for the c-pawn, as 8 b4 is met by 8...a5.

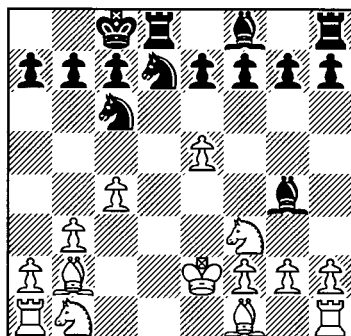
The best option for White is 6 ♖xe5, when Black plays 6...g6 and transposes to a line of the Kengis that should equalize, as detailed in Game 23.

6...♙xd1+ 7 ♙xd1 ♙g4 8 b3 ♖c6 9 ♙b2 0-0-0+



Black is already clearly better, with a lead in development and an attack on White's lone centre pawn.

10 ♙e2 ♖d7



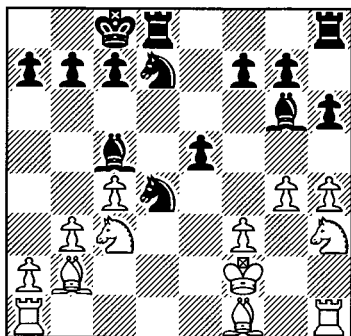
11 e6

There is nothing better, but White is unable to make this work as an obstructive sac, since Black's following manoeuvre both holds the pawn and avoids the self-blocking doubleton on e6.

11...♙xe6 12 ♖g5 ♙g4+ 13 f3 ♙h5

Black is just a good pawn up.

14 g4 ♙g6 15 h4 h6 16 ♖h3 e5 17 ♖c3 ♖d4+ 18 ♙f2 ♙c5



19 ♖a4 ♖xb3+! 0-1

White resigns, as after 20 ♖xc5 ♗dxc5 21 ♖e1 (or 21 axb3 ♖d2+ with an easy win) 21...♗d2+ 22 ♖e2 ♗d3+ 23 ♔g3 ♖xb2 Black emerges *two* pawns up.

The importance of this game is that White cannot force Black into Alekhine's dangerous gambit. After the accurate 5...dxe5 White has nothing better than to transpose into a rather harmless Kengis Variation – one recalls that the most dangerous lines against the Kengis are the restrained ones with White's light-squared bishop on e2 or g2, and the c-pawn not yet committed.

Summary

None of these lines present the slightest difficulty to the Alekhine player, as long as you are flexible! Since the pure "Alekhine" lines against 4 ♗c4 (Games 60 and 61 – the only even slightly dangerous variation in this chapter) don't work so well, Black should be willing to look at the position objectively, like Vaganian, and recognize that the time has come to transpose to a good French!

The other, completely inoffensive, lines can be handled easily by typical Alekhine methods.

Chapter Nine

Third Move Sidelines

Our Hero: Zoltan Varga

After making the best try for an advantage against the Alekhine, 2 e5, White sometimes – or quite often – pretty much tosses the idea of an opening plus out the window by playing some third move deviation instead of the normal and strong 3 d4 or the forcing 3 c4.

The most common of these offbeat third moves is 3 ♖c3. Actually I shouldn't even call this "offbeat" – it's astonishingly popular (almost 2000 games in the *MegaBase*!) for a move that gives White absolutely nothing!

As noted in the first chapter, for some reason various players thought this variation would be ideal to play against a world champion – we enjoyed their losses in Games 2, 6 and 9. I had the pleasure of playing against this move recently (Game 67) and the hero

of our chapter, GM Zoltan Varga, has had some fun against it as well (see Game 66).

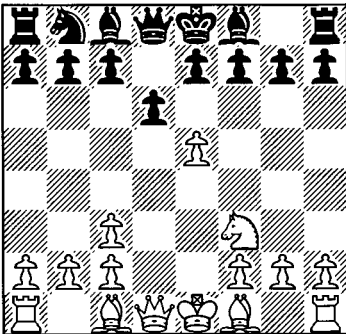
Some statistics are interesting: Varga, a lifelong Alekhine player, has 153 games in the database in which he countered with our favourite opening (in Chapter Five, note to Game 38, we saw his turncoat win on the white side!). He has scored 65 wins, 59 draws, and only 29 losses – that is, an awesome 61% score with Black at the GM level. But that's not all! Quite a few of his opponents thought the "ever-popular" 3 ♖c3 might work against such an Alekhine expert, and indeed Varga faced this nine times: and he earned his hero status by scoring 4 wins, 4 draws, and only one loss, for a demonic Black score of 66.6%!

The following three games feature 3 ♘c3. In the last game of the chapter we see White try 3 g3, with some even lesser deviations considered in the notes.

Game 65
F.Sämisch-A.Alekhine
Budapest 1921

1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 ♘c3

We already saw in Chapter One that some other World Champions successfully met this with the immediate 3...♘xc3, but my preference has been for the solution of Alekhine himself, who kept his knight in the centre, at least for another move, with 3...e6 – as we see here and in the next two games. While Games 2, 6 and 9 may have given the impression that 3...♘xc3 is a walk-over for Black, it's worth noting that the great Keres played the white side with success. He would capture with 4 dxc3 and use the open lines to set up attacking chances. Here are a couple of Keres' wins after 4...d6 5 ♘f3 and then:



a) 5...g6 6 ♘c4 ♘c6 7 ♙f4 e6 8 exd6 cxd6 9 ♖e2 ♙e7 10 0-0-0 a6 11 h4 b5 12 ♙b3 d5 13 ♖he1 ♙d7 14 ♙xd5! (a beautiful sacrifice, and just the kind of open attacking game Keres played so well) 14...exd5 15 ♘e5 ♘xe5 16 ♖xe5 0-0 17 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 18 ♖xe7 ♙e6 19 ♙e5 ♖fe8 20 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 21 ♙f6 h5 22 f3 ♖c8 23 ♙d2 ♙f8 24 ♖e1 ♙e8 25 g4 hxg4 26 fxg4 ♙f8 27 ♖g1 ♙g8 28 h5 gxh5 29 gxh5+ ♙h7 30 ♙d4 ♖g8 31 ♖xg8 ♙xg8 32 b4 ♙f5 33 ♙e5 ♙h7 34 ♙f4 ♙g4 35 h6 ♙f5 36 ♙e3 ♙xc2 37 ♙d4 ♙b1 38 a3 ♙a2 39 ♙c5 ♙g6 40 ♙b6 ♙c4 41 ♙xa6 ♙d3 42 ♙a5 ♙f6 43 a4 bxa4 44 ♙xa4 ♙e6 45 ♙a5 1-0 P.Keres-H.Westerinen, Tallinn 1971.

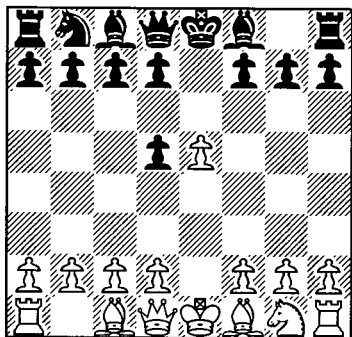
b) 5...♘c6 6 ♙b5 (better than 6 ♙c4 dxe5, as in Games 6 and 9) 6...♙d7 7 ♖e2 dxe5 8 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 9 ♖xe5 c6 (Korchnoi's 9...f6 is correct – see the notes to move 6 in Game 9) 10 ♙c4 ♖b8 11 ♖e4 e6 12 ♙g5 h6 13 ♙h4 ♙d6 14 0-0-0 ♖c7 15 ♖d4 ♙e5 16 ♖c5 (White prevents Black's castling and stands better in this sharp position) 16...♙f6 17 ♙xf6 ♖f4+ 18 ♖d2 gxf6 19 ♖hd1 b6 20 ♖h5 0-0-0 21 ♙a6+ ♙c7 22 g3 ♖f5 23 ♖xf7 e5 24 ♖d6 ♖h7 25 ♖xc6+! ♙b8 (if 25...♙xc6, 26 ♖c4 is mate) 26 ♖d5 ♖xf2 27 ♖d6+ ♙a8 28 ♙b7+ ♙xb7 29 ♖c7+ 1-0 P.Keres-L.Schmid, Zürich 1961.

Of course Black can defend these positions as noted, but one sees that Keres obtained practical chances – whereas after Alekhine's move I see no attack for White at all!

3...e6 4 xd5








By far the most popular: this natural capture will be covered here and in the next game, while other White 4th moves will be seen in Game 67.















4...exd5



Black has no worries about the doubled pawns, as they will soon be dissolved by ...d7-d6.

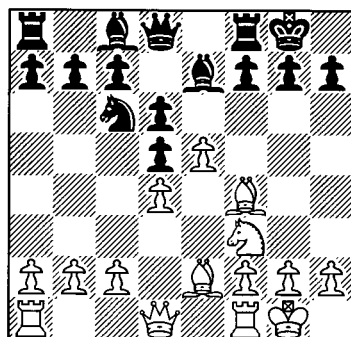
5 d4

The only problem that I see with 3...e6 is that it sometimes leads to amazingly drawish lines reminiscent of the most boring Exchange French – the two following games are cases in point. Note that Cafferty can hardly avoid utterly dead equality, since Black's best in the final position, 15...g5, is met by 16 xg5 and an opposite-coloured bishop snorefest; while the very sharp Italian GM Mariotti is similarly unable to do anything against his exceptionally peaceable opponent: 5 f3 c6 6 d4 d6 7 g3 (equally exciting was 7 exd6 xd6 8 d3 0-0 9 e2 d7 10 0-0 f6 11 h3 h6 12 g3 h7 13 f5 xf5 14 xf5 g6 15 f3 ½-½ M.Horton-






B.Cafferty, British Ch., Bristol 1968)
7...dxe5 8 xe5+ e7 9 xe7+ xe7 10 d3 0-0 11 f4 f6 12 c3 e8+ 13 e2 g4 14 f3 h5 15 f2 g6 16 xg6 hxg6 ½-½ V.Musil-S.Mariotti, Ljubljana 1975.

All I can recommend when you face the White opponent determined to draw is – take the draw fast and rest up for your next White!


5...d6 6 f3 c6 7 e2 e7 8 f4 0-0 9 0-0



9...f6






9...dxe5 10 xe5 xe5 11 xe5 f6 12 g3 f5 13 c3 c6 is even simpler.

10 exd6

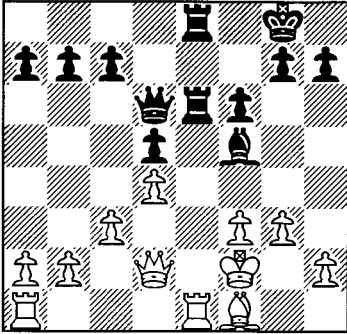
10 exf6 xf6 unbalances the position, which White did not want.

10...xd6

A typical drawish Exchange French has been reached.

11 d2 g4 12 fe1 e8 13 c3 e7 14 xd6 xd6 15 h4 d7 16 g3 f5 17 xf5 xf5 18 f3 e6 19 f1 ae8 20 f2

White gets the heavy pieces off the board and the draw is inevitable.



20...Qf7 21 Rxe6 Qxe6 22 Re1 Qxe1+
23 Qxe1 Rxe1 24 Qxe1 1/2-1/2

Yes, White can play for a draw in this variation, but theoretically that's a big success for Black. In the next two games we see White play more actively in the opening – to his cost!

Game 66

A.Goloshchapov-Z.Varga
Miskolc 2004

1 e4 Qf6 2 e5 Qd5 3 Qc3

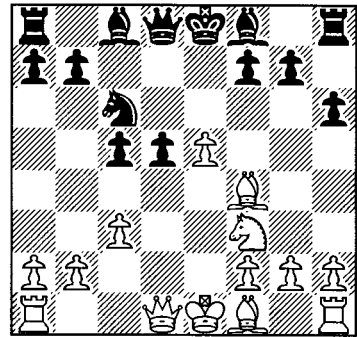
I really like Finkel's comment in the *MegaBase* to this game: "I've got to admit that it would be too dramatic to put the blame for White's defeat on this one [move], but there is no doubt that 3 Qc3 isn't the best way to meet an Alekhine Defence!"

3...e6 4 Qxd5 exd5 5 d4 d6 6 Qf4 dxe5
7 dxe5

Goloshchapov was the higher rated in this GM vs. GM encounter, so no doubt he was playing for the win with the white pieces – but now Black gets

space in the centre and stands at least equal in the unbalanced position. If White wants a draw then Qxe5 should be played, with a level game: 7 Qxe5 Qc6 8 Qf3 (not 8 Qg3 Qe7+ 9 Qe2 Qb4+ and Black wins a pawn) 8...Qe7 (8...Qxe5 9 Qxe5 Qd6 10 Qd3 is also equal) 9 Qe2 Qg4 10 O-O-O O-O-O 11 Qe3 f6 12 Qf4 Qxe3+ 13 Qxe3 and nothing much is happening.

7...c5 8 Qf3 Qc6 9 c3 h6



10 Qd3 Qe6 11 h3

It's not clear why White needs this move, since the black bishop has already settled in on e6, and h2-h3 can invite a ...g5-g4 attack later. Probably best is the simple 11 O-O with approximate equality.

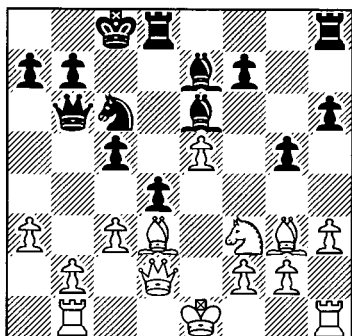
11...Qe7 12 Qd2 Qb6

Now White should still castle; delaying it one more move allows the alert Varga to seize the initiative with a tactical trick.

13 Qb1?! d4! 14 a3

White can't take, as 14 cxd4 allows 14...c4 winning a piece due to the emergent threat of ...Qb4.

14...g5 15 ♖g3 0-0-0



Black has more space and the initiative across the board – and this is only move 15 of a GM encounter!

16 0-0 c4 17 ♖e4 dxc3

Black goes for active piece play, though 17...d3, with a strong protected passed pawn, is also good.

18 ♜xc3 ♘d4 19 ♘xd4 ♜xd4 20 f3

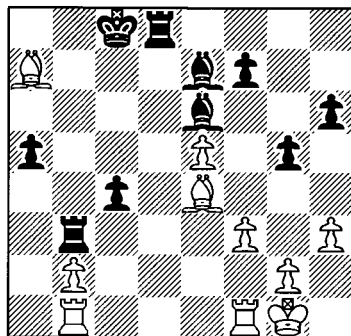
Or 20 ♖c2 ♜hd8 with a clear advantage to Black.

20...♜d3+ 21 ♖f2 ♜xc3 22 ♖xb6 ♜b3 23 ♖xa7 b6 24 a4

White has to save his trapped bishop immediately, since if 24 ♜fd1 ♖c5+ 25 ♖h2 ♜e8, intending ...♜e7, wins for Black.

24...♜d8 25 a5 bxa5

After a long, fairly forced sequence we see that Black has the better end-game. On the kingside his three pawns hold White's four, while on the queen-side it's clear Black will be able to create a passed pawn. Although White may be able to draw with exact play, it's evident that he has an extremely difficult defence ahead.



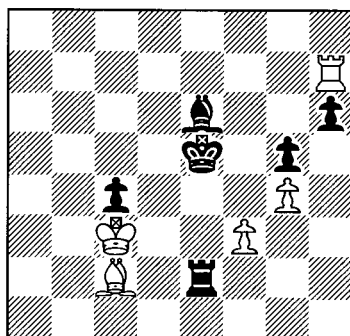
26 ♖f2 ♜d2 27 ♖e1 ♜dxb2 28 ♜xb2 ♜xb2 29 ♖xa5 ♖c5+ 30 ♖h1 ♖d4 31 ♜d1 ♜b5! 32 ♜xd4 ♜xa5 33 ♖g1 ♜xe5

Black has an extra, outside passed pawn, but White's stubborn resistance makes it hard to win.

34 ♖f2 ♖c7 35 ♜d2 ♖b6 36 ♖e3 ♖c5 37 ♜a2 f5 38 ♜a5+ ♖d6 39 ♜a6+ ♖e7 40 ♖d4 ♜b5 41 ♖c2 ♜d5+ 42 ♖c3

Not 42 ♖xc4? ♜a5+.

42...♜e5 43 ♜a7+ ♖f6 44 ♜h7 ♖g6 45 ♜e7 ♜e2 46 g4 ♖f6 47 ♜h7 fxg4 48 hxg4 ♖e5!



Black sacrifices a pawn to make progress, but the win is still not clear.

49 ♜xh6 ♜e3+ 50 ♖d2 ♖d4 51 ♖d1 c3+

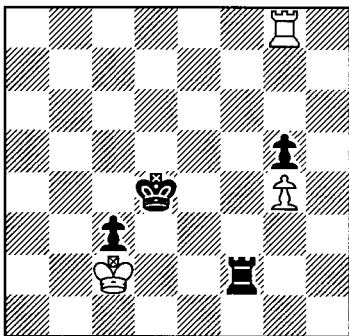
52 ♖c2 ♜e1 53 ♜f6

A good try is 53 ♜g6! with counterplay, and it's not clear that Black wins – which shows just how hard it is to beat a Grandmaster! 53...♖c4! 54 ♜g7 (Black can give up his next to last pawn, as 54 ♜xg5 ♖b4 wins for him) 54...♙d5 55 ♜xg5 ♙c6 56 ♜a5 ♖b4 57 ♜a7 ♙a4+ 58 ♜xa4+ ♖xa4 59 g5! (but not 59 ♖xc3+? ♜xd1 and the tablebase informs me that Black wins) 59...♖b4 60 f4 ♜f1 61 g6 ♜xf4 62 g7 ♜f2+ 63 ♖c1 ♜g2 64 ♙f3!! ♜xg7 65 ♙e4 and White sets up the Del Rio fortress, which has been known to be a draw since 1750, and was once used by Botvinnik to save a seemingly lost position against Laszlo Szabo.

53...♜e3 54 ♜f8 ♙d5 55 ♜d8 ♖c5 56 ♜d7 ♖c4 57 ♜d8

If 57 ♜c7+ ♖b4 and White has no checks, while Black is coming in with ...♙b3+ and ...♜e1.

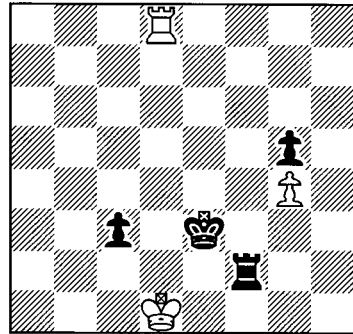
57...♙xf3 58 ♙xf3 ♜xf3 59 ♜c8+ ♙d4 60 ♜g8 ♜f2+

**61 ♖d1?**

It's extremely hard to believe but, just as it looks like Black is cruising to

victory, the exact 61 ♖c1!! may draw! I can't find anything except 61...♙d3 62 ♜d8+ ♖e3 63 ♜e8+ ♖f4 64 ♜f8+ ♖g3 65 ♜f5! when White's rook is immune, so he wins his pawn back and draws. As we will soon see, the same variation fails when the white king is on d1.

61...♙d3 62 ♜d8+ ♖e3

**63 ♜c8**

Now if 63 ♜g8 ♖f4 64 ♜f8+ ♖g3 65 ♜f5 Black has 65...♜d2+! 66 ♖c1 ♖xg4 and wins – note that the key check on d2 was not available in the above variation when the white king was on c1!

63...c2+ 64 ♖c1 ♜g2 65 ♜c5 ♖f4 66 ♜c4+ ♖f3 67 ♖b2 ♖g3 68 ♖c1 ♖h3 69 ♖b2 ♜xg4 0-1

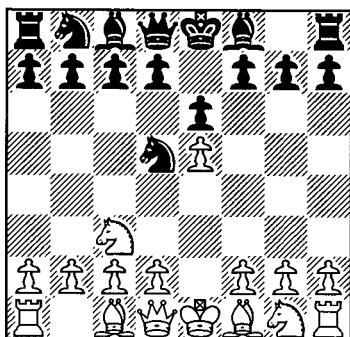
White resigns in view of 70 ♜xc2 ♜g2 and the g-pawn goes through – but that was hard work!

The ending might have been drawn with superlative play by White, but the verdict on the opening is clear: when White tried to keep a pawn in the centre (instead of 7 ♙xe5 with equality), he was running some risks, and slight

errors led to a significant advantage for Black. Clearly 3 dxc3 cannot be used as a serious winning attempt by White.

Game 67
K.Meekins-T.Taylor
Ohio 2008

1 e4 dxf6 2 e5 d5 3 dxc3 e6



4 d4

Besides 4 dxd5 seen in the previous two games, White has also tried the text plus a couple of developing moves:

a) 4 dxc4 just invites a ...d7-d5 counter to exploit White's badly-placed bishop: 4... dxc3 (4... dxb6 5 dxb3 d5 is also good) 5 dxc3 d5 6 dxd3 (if 6 exd6 dxd6 7 dxf3 dxc6 8 0-0 0-0 and Black has a good extra pawn on the kingside, while White has a lamed queenside pawn majority) 6... dxc6 (stronger than the immediate 6...c5 7 c4) 7 dxf3 (or 7 dxf4 g5 8 dxc3 dxc7 9 We2 dxd7 10 0-0-0 h5 11 h3 We7 12 dxf3 0-0-0 with good counterplay) 7...h6 8 h4 da5 9 dxf4 c5 10 Wd2 dxd7 11 dxd1 Wb6 12 Wc1 0-0-0

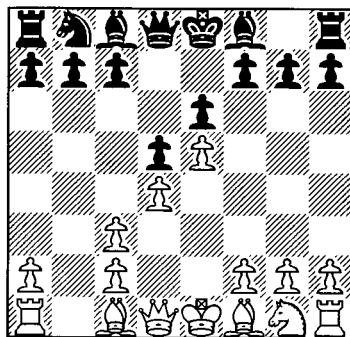
13 0-0 dxc6 14 Wfe1 de7 15 b3 d4! (just as Varga played in the previous game) 16 b4 cxb4 17 dxd4 bxc3 18 dxc6 dxc6 19 dxc3 g5 20 hxcg5 dxcg5 21 Wa3 dxd2 22 Wb1 Wa5 23 Wxb3 Wb4 24 Wf1 Wxb3 25 axb3 dxd3 ! 26 cxd3 dxd4 and White's rooks are defenceless against Black's passed pawn and strong knight, 0-1 L.Moura-M.Podgaets, World Student Team Ch., Graz 1972.

b) 4 dxf3 leads to simple equality, reminiscent of Game 65; e.g. 4...d6 5 dxd5 exd5 6 d4 dxc6 7 h3 dxc5 8 dxc5 de7 9 c3 dxf5 10 dxd3 de4 11 dxf4 Wd7 12 dxe4 dxc4 13 Wxd7+ cxd7 14 0-0-0+ de6 15 dxd2 and now, instead of the extravagant 15...g5 that risked loss in A.Satonen-E.Kengis, Jyvaskyla 1991, our Chapter Three hero should have played the simple 15... dxc5 16 dxc4 Wad8 17 Whe1 Wxd1+ 18 cxd1 Wd8+ 19 dxc2 f6 with equality.

4... dxc3

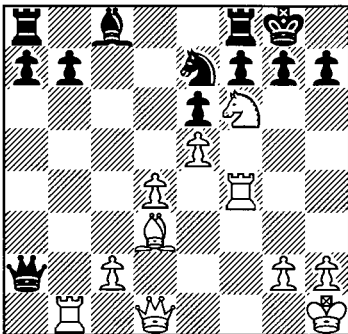
Now that White can no longer capture away from the centre (!) I'm happy to inflict doubled pawns on him!

5 bxc3 d5



Black enters a good French, Vaganian style, where White already has doubled c-pawns – and unlike the Winawer variation, Black hasn't had to pay with the two bishops.

5...d6 is weaker, as after 6 f4 Black doesn't have enough space in the centre. Tal gives a drastic lesson as follows: 6...c5 (or 6...dxe5 7 fxe5 ♖h4+ 8 ♔e2 b6 9 ♜f3 ♙a6+ 10 ♔e3 ♜d8 11 ♙xa6 ♜xa6 12 ♜d3 ♜b8 13 ♜e4 c6 14 c4 ♙e7 15 a4 0-0 16 ♙a3 h6 17 ♜hb1 ♙xa3 18 ♜xa3 ♜c7 19 ♜f2, when White corrected his king position and went on to win in P.Dudzinski-T.Delega, Polish Team Ch. 2004) 7 ♜f3 cxd4 8 cxd4 dxe5 9 fxe5 ♙b4+ 10 ♙d2 ♜a5 11 ♙d3 ♜c6 12 0-0 ♙xd2 13 ♜xd2 ♜c3 14 ♜f4 0-0 (not 14...♜xd4? 15 ♜e4 and ♜d6+ wins) 15 ♜h1 ♜e7 (15...♜xd4 now fails to 16 ♙xh7+ ♜xh7 17 ♜e4 ♜c4 18 ♜h5+ ♜g8 19 ♜f6+ and mates – White's tactical defence of his centre is a marvel) 16 ♜e4 ♜b2 17 ♜b1 ♜xa2 18 ♜f6+!! (vintage Tal)



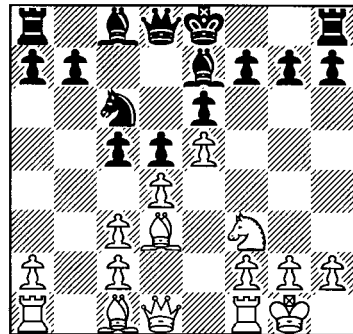
18...gxf6 19 ♙xh7+ ♜h8 20 ♜h4 ♜g7 21 ♜c1 ♜g8 22 ♙xg8 1-0 M.Tal-

D.Gedevanishvili, Georgian Ch. 1970. Black resigns as 22...♜xg8 23 ♜b3 really brings the pain!

6 ♜f3

6 ♙d3 transposes to W.Heidenfeld-H.Hecht, Nice Olympiad 1974, where Black's play is a model of how to handle a blocked position. 6...c5 7 f4 ♜c6 8 ♜f3 ♜a5 9 ♙d2 ♜a4 10 ♙e3 c4 11 ♙e2 ♙a3 12 ♙c1 ♜a5 13 ♙d2 ♙e7 14 ♜e1 ♙d7 15 ♙e3 f6 16 ♜f1 fxe5 17 fxe5 0-0 (Black's king is safe and now he makes his bad bishop good, while White still suffers from his weak doubled pawns) 18 ♜f2 ♙e8 19 ♜g1 ♙g6 20 ♙d1 ♜f7 21 ♜g5 ♜xf1+ 22 ♜xf1 ♙xg5 23 ♙xg5 ♜f8+ 24 ♙f3 (White has no choice: if 24 ♜g1 ♜xd4!, or 24 ♙e2 ♜xd4+! 25 cxd4 ♙h5+ wins) 24...♙xc2, when Black had picked off a clear pawn and went on to win.

6...c5 7 ♙d3 ♜c6 8 0-0 ♙e7



Black has an excellent French, with good development and long-term pressure against White's doubled pawns. As mentioned above, White doesn't even have the two bishops as compensation!

The only problem is that this is nothing like any kind of “normal” Alekhine position – the ideas are pure French. But in my opinion no single opening will solve all your problems – you need to know the ideas of all the major openings, and then you can incorporate them into your play.

Another way to put it is that sometimes the best Alekhine is a French! Or as we will see in the next chapter, perhaps a Vienna!

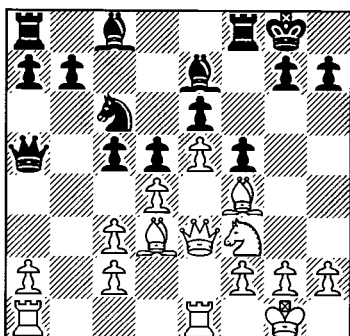
9 ♖f4 O-O 10 ♜d2 f6

10...c4 11 ♙e2 ♙d7 à la Hecht is a good alternative.

11 ♜fe1 ♜a5 12 ♜e3

Better is 12 exf6 ♜xf6 (not 12...♙xf6? 13 ♙d6) 13 ♙g5 ♜f7 14 ♙xe7 ♜xe7 with equality, as Black’s play against White’s doubled pawns compensates for the worse bishop. White, having nothing better, should have gone for this.

12...f5!



White’s c-pawn was defended tactically by ♙xh7+, but now Black threatens to take. White has no counterplay

and permanent weaknesses on the c-file – which means a clear advantage to Black, and it’s only move 12!

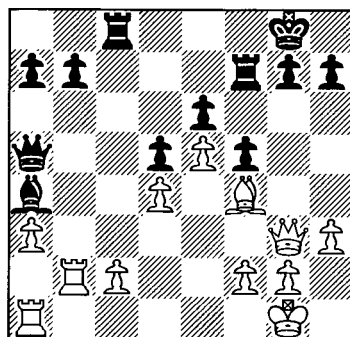
13 ♙f1 ♙d7 14 h3 ♜ac8 15 a3 ♜a4 16 dxc5

Maybe White should just dig in with the horribly passive 16 ♜ec1.

16...♙a5 17 ♙d4 ♙xc5 18 ♙d3 ♙c6 19 ♙b5 ♜a5 20 ♙xc6 ♙xc6 21 ♜g3

Fritz gives 21 ♜d3, though I doubt the c-pawns can be held in the long run. The text should lose a pawn.

21...♙xd4 22 cxd4 ♙a4 23 ♜eb1 ♜f7 24 ♜b2

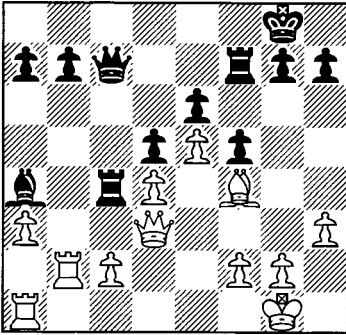


24...♜c4?

Hesitation! I’ve played close to perfectly so far and now should cash in with the immediate 24...♙xc2!, when White has no way to take advantage of the potential c-file pin: 25 ♜c1 ♜a4 26 ♜b4 ♜e8 27 ♜b2 ♜fc7 28 ♙h6 ♜d7 29 ♙d2 ♜c4 and the bishop is free, so White has nothing for the pawn (very similar to the main game).

Delaying as I did (thinking the pawn was falling anyway) gives White a defence.

25 ♔d3 ♚c7



26 ♖aa2?

Blundering back; instead White may hold with 26 ♖c1! and then:


a) 26...♖c3 27 ♜xb7! (pay careful attention to this tactic) 27...♜xd3 28 ♜xc7 ♜xd4 (Black has no chances after 28...♜xc7 29 cxd3 ♜xc1+ 30 ♙xc1 ♙c2 31 f3 ♙xd3 with a draw) 29 ♖c8+ ♜f8 30 ♜xf8+ ♙xf8 31 ♙e3 ♖c4 32 c3 and despite White's very ugly position, the opposite-coloured bishops carry so much weight that White might draw.

b) 26...b6 27 c3 ♖f8 28 ♖b4 ♜c8 29 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 30 ♜xc4 ♜xc4 and again it's questionable if Black's advantage is great enough to win, given the leveling factor of the opposite bishops.

26...♖c3 27 ♔e2

Now the noted tactic above doesn't work! If 27 Rxb7 Qxd3 28 Qxc7 Qd1 ! and this checking resource wins for Black, reminiscent of Varga's win in the previous game. In the note above, with the white rook on c1, the first player can defend as there is no free check on the back rank.

27...♔c6 28 ♖d2

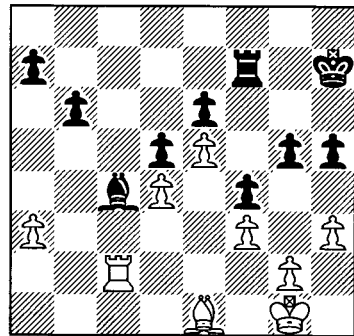
Or 28 g5 c7 29 g3 xc2 30 xc2
xc2 and the pawn goes anyway.

28...♖xc2 29 ♖xc2 ♘xc2 30 ♘e1 ♘b3

Black is a clear pawn up, but still faces a tough battle to win in view of the opposite-coloured bishops.

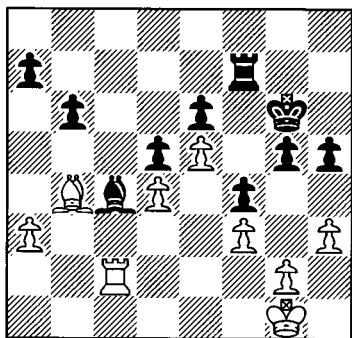
31 ♖b2 ♙c4 32 ♚d2 f4 33 f3 g5 34 ♙a5
b6 35 ♙b4 h5 36 ♙d2 ♙a4 37 ♙c2
♙xc2 38 ♖xc2 ♙h7

A classic ending. With the rooks off, the pure opposite bishop ending would probably be a draw – but here Black can play for a win by using the rook to create activity on both wings.



I consider this one of my best endings ever, which is rare as most of my best endings were played years before in the more chess-friendly days of adjournments and slow time controls. The only reason I was able to manoeuvre confidently here was that I had played the first part of the game so quickly that I had time to think in the one hour sudden death control we were now entering.

39 **b4** **g6**



The win consists of several stages:

1. (moves 39-44) Black accomplishes the ...g5-g4 break, so that a file can always be opened on the kingside – it's important that Black have play on both sides of the board.

2. (moves 45-50) Black creates a passed pawn on the queenside.

3. (moves 51-57) Black brings his king to the queenside to free the rook, which can then finally penetrate on the open g-file.

4. (moves 58-60) When White crosses this plan, by activating his bishop on the kingside – and taking a pawn, but that's not important – Black ties up the white rook by advancing his passed pawn to the seventh.

5. (moves 61-76) Black puts his pieces on ideal squares, then brings the black king all the way back around to the kingside, where his majesty's threatened entrance forces the decisive win of material.

It does not seem that White had any effective defence to this plan; the key for Black was seeing the long view,

rather than concentrating on short tactical sequences.

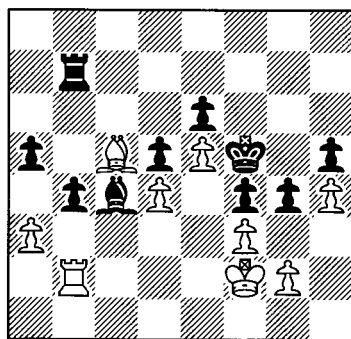
40 ♖f2 ♜f5 41 ♜c1 ♜h7 42 ♜h1 ♜c7 43 ♙d6 ♜c8 44 ♜c1 g4

The first step is completed; White can't stop Black from opening a king-side file.

45 h4 a5 46 ♙e7 ♜g8 47 ♙d6 b5 48 ♙c5 ♜g7 49 ♜b1 ♜b7 50 ♜b2

If 50 ♜a1 b4 51 axb4 axb4 52 ♜b1 b3 and the passed pawn is decisive.

50...b4!



It's worth a temporary pawn sacrifice to create a passed pawn – and now step two is completed.

51 axb4 a4 52 b5

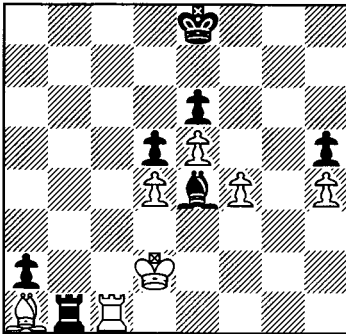
If White does not sacrifice the pawn back, the black a-pawn gets to a2 where it ties down the white rook, leading to a slow but inevitable win.

52...♙xb5 53 ♙a3 ♜g6 54 ♜e1 ♜f7 55 ♜b1 ♜e8 56 ♙c1 gxf3 57 gxf3 ♙d7

Step three is completed. Black can't trade rooks, but now I threaten ...♙c6, when the bishop is protected and the black rook can maraud on the kingside. White avoids that by taking on f4, so he

can block the g-file with ♖g5, but now the black a-pawn advances; the next two moves complete step four, as I establish a dangerous pawn on the seventh rank.

58 ♖xf4 a3 59 ♖a1 ♖a7 60 ♖d2 a2 61 ♖c3 ♖d3 62 ♖d1 ♖f5 63 ♖d2 ♖b7 64 ♖c1 ♖b1 65 ♖a1 ♖h3 66 f4 ♖f5 67 ♖e1 ♖e4 68 ♖c1 ♖e8



Now begins the final stage: the black king plans to walk over to f5 and begin munching pawns. There is nothing White can do about this: material will be lost on one wing or the other.

69 ♖c3 ♖f7 70 ♖e1 ♖g6 71 ♖e3

Or 71 ♖c1 ♖f5 72 ♖e1 ♖xf4 73 ♖c1 ♖g4 74 ♖e1 ♖xh4 and Black will win with the h-pawn.

71...a1 ♖ 72 ♖xa1 ♖xa1 73 ♖g3+ ♖f5 74 ♖g5+ ♖xf4 75 ♖xh5 ♖a4 76 ♖c3 ♖c4+ 0-1

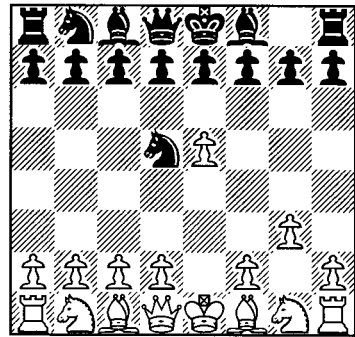
The base of White's pawn chain finally falls, so it's time to resign. It's nice to win a game these days by strategical planning, as opposed to time-trouble tricks!

As far as the opening goes White

had to fight to stay level, since Black got a superior French with long-term play against White's doubled pawns.

Game 68
K.Kerek-E.Mensch
Budapest 1997

1 e4 ♖f6 2 e5 ♖d5 3 g3



Both this and 3 ♖c4 can be met in Vaganian (French!) style.

Note that 3 ♖c4 is actually a poor cousin of the line in the Vaganian game (which occurred after 3 d4 d6 4 ♖c4), as Black can play ...d7-d5 in one move, so is actually a tempo up on Game 61.

Here's an example of the suffering poor relation: 3 ♖c4 ♖b6 4 ♖b3 e6 (or 4...d5) 5 d4 d5 6 ♖f3 (if 6 exd6 cxd6 Black has a central pawn majority and the b3-bishop is still blocked) 6...c5 (as mentioned above, Black is a tempo ahead of the Vaganian game and so has a kind of super-French – why is the white bishop on b3?) 7 dxc5 ♖xc5 8 0-0

♖c6 9 ♗g5 ♗e7 10 ♗f4 0-0 11 ♖c3 a6
12 a3 ♗d7 13 ♖e2 ♜c8 14 c3 ♖a5 15
♗c2 ♖bc4 16 b4 ♖c6 17 ♜d3 g6 18
♖g3 f6 (Black takes over the centre and
stands much better) 19 exf6 ♗xf6 20
♖h5 ♖6e5 21 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 22 ♖xf6+
♜xf6 23 ♗xe5 ♜xe5 24 ♜fe1 ♜xc3
(Black is a pawn ahead for exactly nothing)
25 ♜xc3 ♜xc3 26 ♗d1 ♜fc8 27 ♗g4
♗f7 28 h3 ♗f6 29 ♜ad1 h5 30 ♜xd5
exd5 31 ♗xd7 ♜c1 32 ♜xc1 ♜xc1+ 33
♗h2 d4 34 g4 d3 0-1 W.Kopp-A.Lenz,
Ludwigshafen 1995.

3...♖b6 4 ♗g2 d5

In both this line and the note above,
White spends two moves to put a
bishop on a soon to be closed diagonal:
♗c4-b3 runs into ...d7-d5; or here after
g2-g3/♗g2 again Black plays ...d7-d5.
Needless to say, in the regular French
White's light-squared bishop is virtu-
ally never developed to b3 or g2 – but
the black knight often travels to b6; e.g.
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖d2 ♖f6 4 e5 ♖fd7 5
♗d3 c5 6 c3 ♖c6 7 ♖e2 cxd4 8 cxd4
♖b6 is the Leningrad Variation against
the Tarrasch.

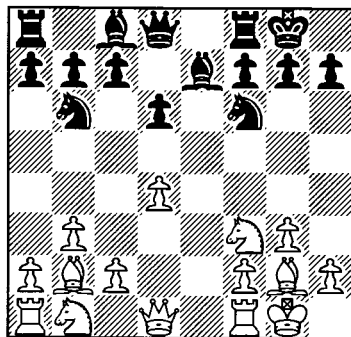
5 exd6

5 d4 e6 6 ♖e2 c5 7 c3 ♗d7 is a good
French for Black.

5...exd6 6 d4 ♗e7 7 ♖f3

The first player switched sides in the
following short game from the same
tournament, and drew easily: 7 h3 0-0
8 ♖f3 ♗f6 9 0-0 ♗f5 10 b3 d5 11 ♗b2
♖c6 ½-½ Z.Szabo-L.Kerek, Budapest
1997.

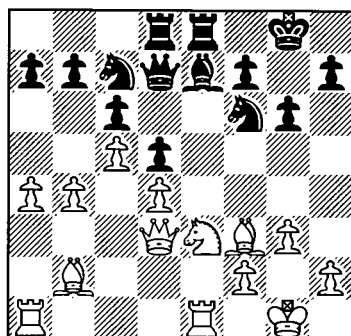
7...0-0 8 0-0 ♖8d7 9 b3 ♖f6 10 ♗b2



10...c6

10...♗g4 11 ♖bd2 d5 is simple
equality; Black plays as in the Larsen
Exchange (Chapter Five) that we have
already covered.

11 ♖bd2 ♗g4 12 ♜e1 ♜e8 13 ♖f1 ♜d7
14 ♖e3 ♗h5 15 c4 ♜ad8 16 a4 d5 17 c5
♖a8 18 ♜d3 ♗xf3 19 ♗xf3 g6 20 b4
♖c7



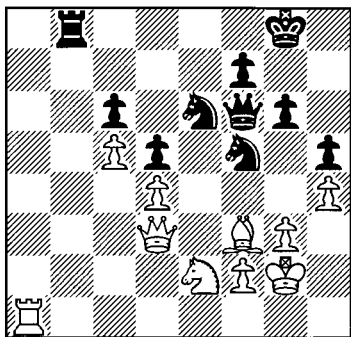
21 ♜ad1

21 ♜e2 is more to the point, given
Black's slow play – though there doesn't
seem to be anything in it after 21...♗f8.

21...a6 22 h4 h5 23 ♖g2 ♖e6 24 ♗c1
♖g7 25 ♗g5 ♖h7 26 ♗xe7 ♜xe7 27
♜xe7 ♜xe7 28 b5 axb5 29 axb5 ♜f6

Black takes aim at the base of White's chain, which could easily become weak without pawn support.

30 ♖f4 ♜f5 31 bxc6 bxc6 32 ♜e2 ♜b8
33 ♙g2 ♜f8 34 ♜a1 ♞e6



35 ♜a6?

35 ♜a4 is necessary, when despite Fritz's equals over plus, it's hard for this

human to see how Black can make any progress.

35... ♞fxd4 36 ♞xd4 ♜xd4 37 ♜e3 ♜b2
38 ♜xd4

38 ♙f1 would prolong, but not save the game.

38... ♞xd4 39 ♙d1 ♜b5 0-1

Black ends up with two clear extra pawns.

Summary

One could say that the fianchetto here and 3 ♙c4 in the notes are even more harmless than 3 ♞c3. Black equalizes with ease against the popular knight move; the only drawback with my recommendation, Alekhine's 3...e6, is that White can virtually force an extremely drawish position.

Chapter Ten

Alekhine Declined

Our Hero: Timothy Taylor

After skipping “Lines I Don’t Like” in the previous chapter (I liked Black’s lines, just not White’s), I have some serious bones to pick here! What should Black play if White chooses to decline the Alekhine experience with the most common second move (next to 2 e5): namely 2 ♖c3 - ? (Lesser moves, such as 2 d3, which present no problems at all, are also covered in this chapter – see Games 72-74.)

Now I already know that I play 2...e5 (after 1 e4 ♗f6 2 ♖c3), which I consider simplest and best. But let’s consult some other authorities: namely my five Alekhine’s Defence books. Every single one of them *only* analyzes the reply 2...d5 to 2 ♖c3. For example, in *Alekhine Defense* (1977 Edition), author Norman Weinstein writes: “We limit

ourselves to examine Black’s reply 2...P-Q4” (2...d5).

Limit ourselves, indeed! But what if 2...d5 is not best? Why then should we limit ourselves? John Cox has his doubts; he writes: “personally, I recommend 2...e5.” Does he then show a game with 2...e5? No, as with all other Alekhine authors, he sticks to 2...d5, as the pure “Alekhine” move, and gives only a game with this line – in which Black gets smashed by the Swedish GM Jonny Hector (given here as note ‘b’ to Black’s 3rd move in Game 59, needless to say under “Lines I Don’t Like!”).

I first took a real look at the variation 1 e4 ♗f6 2 ♖c3 d5 3 e5 when I was writing my book *Pawn Sacrifice!*. I included a win by the aforementioned Hector that had continued 3...♗fd7 4 e6!, which I

concluded was a very promising pawn sacrifice. I wrote then that I thought Black could dodge this and equalize with 3...d4, but after further study of Hector's games, I saw I was wrong (see note 'a' in the same Game 59).

The problem after 2...d5 3 e5 is that the Alekhine knight has no good flight square: the usual d5 is now unavailable; d7 is a self block of all his pieces; there is no comfortable retreat after 3...dxe4; and Black's kingside is broken up after the indirect exchange 3...d4 4 exf6 dxc3 5 fxg7.

So I conclude that 2...d5, even if it is the only "Alekhine's Defence" move, is objectively a mistake, and I will not recommend anything I don't believe to be correct.

So while I don't think I'm such a great player as other chapter heroes such as Carlsen, Korchnoi, Larsen and Varga (and I know this from personal experience, having lost a tournament game to each of them!), I do give myself extra points as the *first* Alekhine Defence writer to offer an Open Game in an Alekhine book! Indeed, I present one of my games (I do practice what I preach), as well as a Kramnik win that could be quite useful to the Alekhine player who wishes to come out of the opening alive. In other words, I'm the hero of this chapter more for being willing to "tell it like it is" rather than my play – though I must modestly mention that my win against a high-rated IM is not so bad.

In that encounter (Game 70) the opening goes from Alekhine's Defence through a few transpositions to wind up as a Four Knights. The ultimate study of all the Open Games that could arise after 1 e4 d6 2 d3 e5 is too vast to be contained here, but I offer a few recommendations along the way.

And I give one unqualified opinion: *don't play 2...d5*.

Just in case you don't believe me, check out the...

Lines I Don't Like



1 e4 d6 2 d3

Certainly not the most challenging move, and if Black plays what I recommend, 2...e5, then White has nothing better than some quiet Open Game like the Vienna or the Four Knights, neither of which should give an opening advantage. But what if Black follows his five Alekhine books and plays...

2...d5?!

Then Jonny Hector smiles.

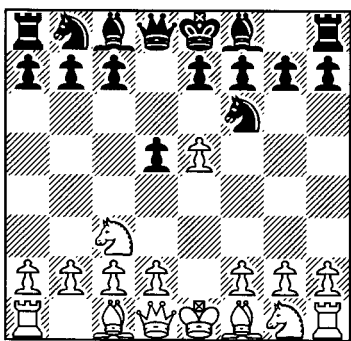
Hector has been making a living off this move – and why not? If Alekhine players persist in playing 2...d5, he may as well harvest the points! From this position Jonny has scored fifteen wins, three draws, and just one loss. That's 87%! His victims have included such

Alekhine Alert!

noted (and stubborn!) Alekhinists like Baburin and two of our heroes, Kengis and Sergeev!

It's all very well to be a proud Alekhine player, and defend the honour of your favourite opening – but one has to recognize that after 2 ♖c3 *the opening is not an Alekhine*. Stubbornly trying to make it so by playing 2...d5 leads to something *like* an Alekhine (yes, your knight gets kicked), but not a good Alekhine or a traditional Alekhine (when your knight happily runs to d5, and you have ...d7-d6 in hand to attack White's centre pawn), but just a *bad* Alekhine where neither of those plays are possible.

3 e5!



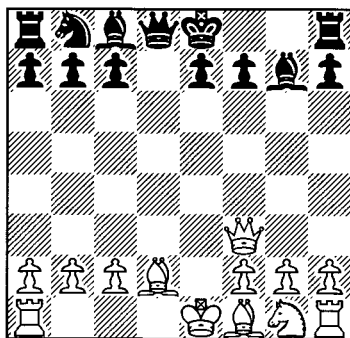
No solution to this attack has been found to date.

3...♟fd7

Black invites an obstructive pawn sacrifice, which Rudolf Spielmann described as “full of promise.” The alternatives are:

a) 3...d4 4 exf6 dxc3 5 fxg7 cxd2+ 6 ♙xd2! ♙xg7 (when I wrote my pawn

sacrifice book, I thought Black could equalize in this line – but Hector's last and the next move, keeping queens on while sacrificing a pawn for attack, changed my mind) 7 ♚f3! and then:

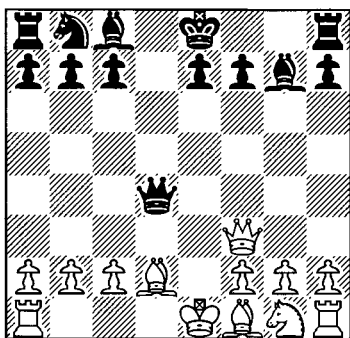


a1) 7...♟c6 (our hero Kengis goes down in flames to Hector in this variation) 8 ♙b5 ♚d6 9 ♙c3 0-0 10 ♙xc6 ♙xc3+ 11 ♚xc3 bxc6 (after this Black never obtains full compensation for his pawn weaknesses) 12 ♟e2 ♙a6 13 ♙d1 ♚e6 14 ♚e3! (Hector gets the queens off and grinds unmercifully) 14...♚xe3 15 fxe3 ♙fd8 16 ♙xd8+ ♙xd8 17 ♙f1 e5 18 ♙f5 ♙e8 19 ♙g5+ ♙f8 20 ♙h5 ♙g7 21 ♙h4 ♙b8 22 b3 ♙c8 23 ♙a4 a6 24 ♟c1 f6 25 ♟d3 ♙b5 26 ♙c4 ♙b6 27 ♟c5 (the doubleton is blockaded and soon...) 27...♙f7 28 ♟a4 ♙b7 29 ♙xc6 (lost!) 29...♙a7 30 ♟c5 (Hector blockades again and cruises to victory) 30...a5 31 ♟d2 ♙e7 32 ♙c3 ♙f5 33 g3 h5 34 e4 ♙h3 35 ♟d2 h4 36 gxh4 ♙a8 37 ♟d3 ♙h8 38 ♙xc7+ ♙d6 39 ♙a7 ♙xh4 40 ♙a6+ ♙e7 41 ♟f2 ♙d7 42 ♙xa5 ♙xh2 43 ♙e3 ♙g2 44 c4 ♙g3+ 45 ♟d2 ♙f3 46 ♙e2 ♙c3 47 ♟d3 ♙c2+ 48 ♙e3 ♙g4 49

♠b4 1-0 J.Hector-E.Kengis, Haninge 1992.

a2) 7...♙xb2 (Black daringly takes the proffered pawn, and suffers much less than Kengis, as the end comes quickly!) 8 ♖d1 (now we see a development sacrifice) 8...♙d6 9 ♙c4 ♙e5+ 10 ♜e2 ♙f6 (Black's multiple queen moves don't help his cause) 11 ♙b3 ♙e5 12 f4 ♙d6 13 ♙c3 e5 14 fxe5 ♙xe5 15 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 16 ♙xf7+ ♜e7 17 0-0 ♙e6 18 ♙b4+ c5 19 ♙h4+ and the black king perishes in the crossfire, 1-0 H.Reefschläger-R.Frosch, Velden 1995.

a3) 7...♙d4 (probably best)

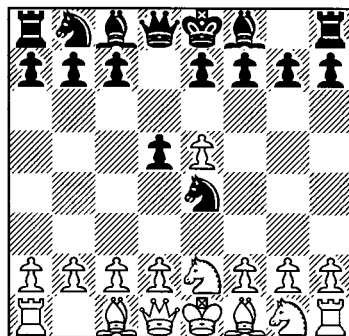


8 ♙c3 ♙g4 9 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 10 0-0-0 ♜c6 11 ♙f4 e5 12 ♙h4 0-0 13 ♖d3 ♙f5 14 ♖g3 ♙g6 15 f4 (15 ♙d3 is simpler with a solid edge due to his safer king, as after the text Black can get some counterplay with 15...♜d4) 15...f5?! 16 ♜f3 ♖ae8 (if 16...e4 17 ♙c4+ ♜h8 18 ♜g5 and White has too many threats) 17 ♜g5 ♜h8 18 ♙c4 ♜d4 19 ♖d1 b5 20 ♙f1 a6 21 ♖a3! (Black can't protect the a-pawn, as defences on the f6-square allow 22 fxe5 gaining a tempo and win-

ning a piece; on the previous move 21 fxe5 would not have been so effective in view of the reply 21...f4) 21...c5 22 ♖xa6 ♖a8 23 ♙xb5!! (White diverts the black knight and attacks the key squares f6 and d8) 23...♜xb5 24 ♜e6 ♙f7 25 ♖xa8 1-0 J.Hector-A.Blees, Kecskemet 1987. Black resigns in view of 25...♖xa8 26 ♖d8+ ♖xd8 27 ♙xd8+ ♙g8 28 ♙f6+ mating.

One sees that Hector's line exploits both Black's lagging development and pawn weaknesses – I can't see an equalizer here. So one might try variation 'b', but I'm afraid the stubborn Alekhinist will just find more problems...

b) 3...♜e4 is met by 4 ♜ce2, when Black's advanced knight has no secure way home and invites tempo-gaining attacks:



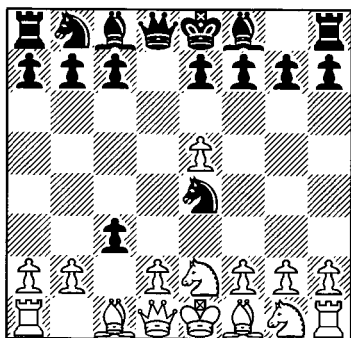
b1) 4...f6 has been played, but Hector has also demolished that line as follows: 5 d3 ♜g5 6 ♙xg5 fxg5 7 h4 g4 8 ♜f4 ♙f5 9 ♜ge2 ♜c6 10 ♜g3 ♙d7 11 d4 (Black has no natural break, while White's knights have beautiful

Alekhine Alert!

squares) 11...♖b4 12 e6 ♜d6 13 ♘xf5 ♜xf4 14 ♘e3 g3 15 ♜f3 ♜xf3 16 gxf3 gxf2+ 17 ♔xf2 0-0-0 18 c3 ♘a6 19 h5 c6 20 ♙xa6 bxa6 21 f4 ♙g8 22 f5 (White has a colossal bind and wins handily) 22...g6 23 hxg6 hxg6 24 ♙ag1 ♙g7 25 ♙xg6 ♙f6 26 ♙hh6 ♙xg6 27 ♙xg6 c5 28 ♘g4 ♙h8 29 f6! ♙xf6 30 ♘xf6 exf6 31 dxc5 ♙e8 32 ♙xf6 ♘d8 33 ♙e3 ♙e7 34 ♙f7+ ♙xe6 35 ♙xa7 ♙e5 36 ♙xa6 ♙b8 37 ♙b6 1-0 J.Hector-M.Van der Werf, Berlin 1993.

b2) 4...d4 (the most popular move) 5 c3 and then:

b21) 5...dxc3 gives up the whole centre, but there may be nothing better. White need only avoid one trap:

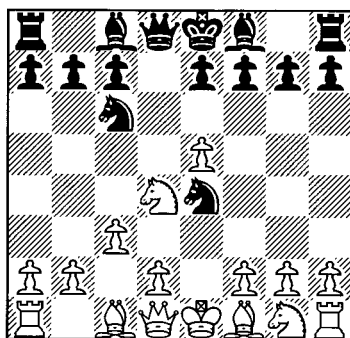


b211) 6 ♜a4+?! (if White is in too much of a hurry we get this disaster...) 6...♘d7 7 ♜xe4? (a free piece?) 7...♘c5! (maybe not!) 8 ♜e3 ♘d3+ 9 ♘d1 cxb2 10 ♙xb2 ♘xb2+ 11 ♙e1 ♘d3+ 12 ♘d1 ♙g4 13 f3 ♜d7 14 ♘c3 (not 14 fxg4? ♜a4 mate) 14...♙f5 15 ♙xd3 ♙xd3 16 ♘ge2 e6 17 ♘f4 ♙a6 18 ♘e4 ♜b5 19 ♜c3 ♙b4 20 ♜xc7 0-0 21 ♙c1 h6 22 ♘c3 ♙xc3 23 ♜xc3 ♜a4+ 0-1 A.Bastian-

Y.Schlueter, Luxembourg Team Ch. 1993 – not recommended for White!

b212) 6 bxc3 (simply recapturing is correct and very good for White, and now ♜a4+ is a threat) 6...♘c5 7 d4 ♘ca6 (the knight finally gets out of the way of the onrushing centre pawns, but Black has a terrible position – no counter-attack can be seen) 8 ♘f4 e6 9 ♘h5 ♜h4 10 ♙f4 ♘d7 11 ♘h3 h6 12 ♙b1 ♘ab8 13 ♜f3 ♜d8 (Black succeeds in rerouting almost all his pieces to the back rank) 14 ♙d3 g6 15 ♙e4! c6 16 ♘g3 ♜a5 17 0-0 ♘b6 18 ♙d3 ♘8d7 19 c4 ♜c3 20 ♙fd1 ♜xd4 21 ♙xg6! ♜xc4 22 ♜h5 fxg6 23 ♜xg6+ ♙e7 24 ♙bc1 ♜b4 25 a3 ♜a4 (if 25...♜xa3 26 ♘g5 wins) 26 ♘f5+ ♘d8 (26...exf5 27 e6 is also quick) 27 ♘d4 (Black is overrun!) 1-0 F.Costa-A.Rawlings, correspondence 2003.

b22) 5...♘c6 (the problem with this is that White can now capture a pawn, while Black's compensation is rather doubtful) 6 ♘xd4 and then:

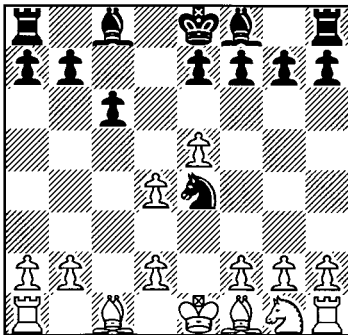


b221) 6...♘e5 is unsound, as 7 ♜e2 skewers the knights and Black has no sufficient defence: 7...♜d5 (if instead

7...f5, then not 8 f3 c5 9 ♖c2 c4 10 fxe4 ♜d3+ 11 ♜d1 fxe4 12 ♜h3 e5 13 ♜e1 ♜h4 when Black has some compensation for the piece, but 8 d3! c5 9 dxe4 cxd4 10 exf5 ♜f7 11 cxd4 ♜xf5 12 ♜b5+ ♜d7 13 ♜f3! gives White an extra pawn and the better position, or 11...♜xd4 12 ♜b5+ and Black must either trade queens with 12...♜d7 when he has nothing for the pawn, or toss another one with 12...♜d7 when he has nothing much for two pawns!) 8 ♜b5 ♜d8 (if 8...♜c6, 9 f3 wins) 9 c4 (White is winning a piece) 9...♜c6 10 f3 f5 11 d4 a6 12 dxe5 axb5 13 fxe4 e6 14 cxb5 ♜c5 15 ♜f3 ♜d7 16 ♜e3 ♜b4+ 17 ♜d2 ♜a4 18 exf5 ♜c5 19 ♜c4 ♜a7 20 0-0-0 ♜e8 21 ♜g5+ ♜c8 22 fxe6 ♜e3+ 23 ♜b1 ♜xb5 24 ♜xb5 ♜xa2+ 25 ♜c2 1-0 P.Ruzicka-L.Zvolanek, Czech League 1996 – White has two extra pieces and a winning attack.

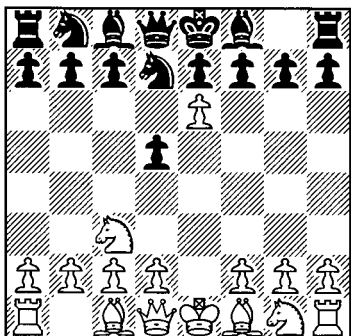
It's clear that Black must simply sacrifice the pawn as in the main variation...

b222) 6...♜xd4 7 ♜a4+ c6 8 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 9 cxd4



(White has the pawn in hand, but was it a sacrifice? – it's not at all clear what compensation Black has, if any) 9...♜g5 10 ♜d3 ♜e6 11 ♜e2 g6 12 ♜e4 ♜c7 13 b3 ♜h6 14 h4 ♜e6 15 h5 ♜d8 16 ♜b2 g5 17 f3 g4 18 f4 ♜d5 19 d3 ♜e6 20 g3 ♜g7 21 ♜f2 f5 22 exf6 exf6 23 ♜xd5 (this eventually allows Black to recover his pawn, but White retains a positional advantage – good enough, though 23 f5 intending ♜h4 looks even stronger) 23...♜xd5 24 ♜c3 ♜d8 (White reaches a winning ending after 24...♜xd4 25 ♜e4 ♜xd3 26 ♜xf6+ ♜f7 27 ♜xg4 ♜d2+ 28 ♜f3, as Black has relieved him of doubled pawns, but has not recovered his material) 25 ♜e4 ♜f7 26 d5 f5 27 ♜xg7 ♜xg7 28 ♜c3 cxd5 29 ♜b5 a6 30 ♜d4 (Black has recovered his pawn, but the white knight dominates his bishop, and the black pawns are targets, especially the key support pawn at f5) 30...♜f6 31 ♜ac1 ♜c8? (31...♜he8 is slightly better, though it seems White wins anyway after 32 ♜c7) 32 ♜xc8 ♜xc8 33 ♜e1 ♜f8 34 ♜e5 (invasion! White grabs a pawn while maintaining the positional advantage – Hector now wins technically) 34...♜c5 35 ♜xf5+ ♜e7 36 ♜xd5 ♜xd4+ 37 ♜xd4 ♜c2+ 38 ♜e3 ♜g2 39 ♜b4 ♜xg3+ 40 ♜e4 b5 41 a4 bxa4 42 bxa4 ♜h3 43 ♜b7+ ♜f6 44 ♜xh7 g3 45 ♜a7! ♜xh5 (if 45...g2 46 ♜xa6+ ♜f7 47 ♜g6 is quick and painless) 46 ♜xa6+ ♜f7 47 ♜f3 ♜d5 48 ♜xg3 ♜xd3+ 49 ♜g4 ♜d1 50 ♜g5 ♜g1+ 51 ♜f5 ♜c1 52 ♜a7+ ♜g8 53 ♜g5 ♜g1+ 54 ♜f6 1-0 J.Hector-I.Anagnostou, Komotini 1992.

4 e6!



To quote myself from *Pawn Sacrifice!*: “This sacrifice has been known to be very strong for over 70 years. Black’s only hope is to find a good way to return the pawn.”

4...fxe6 5 d4

We see now a classic obstructive pawn sacrifice: Black’s queen and king’s bishop are buried under his own blocking pawns, while his king is exposed to attack.

One might expect that White will eventually win with an attack – but to beat an IM in 15 moves, as Hector does here, is simply amazing!

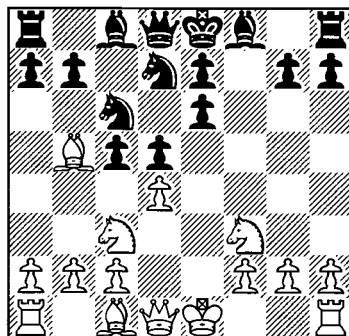
5...c5

Here’s a pretty game from Spielmann’s great book, *The Art of Sacrifice in Chess*, which continued from this position as follows: 5...c5 6 dxc5 7 dxc5 8 dxc6 9 dxc6 10 dxc6 11 dxc6 12 dxc6 13 dxc6 14 dxc6 15 dxc6 16 dxc6 17 dxc6 18 dxc6 19 dxc6 20 dxc6 21 dxc6 22 dxc6 23 dxc6 24 dxc6 25 dxc6 26 dxc6 27 dxc6 28 dxc6 29 dxc6 30 dxc6 31 dxc6 32 dxc6 33 dxc6 34 dxc6 35 dxc6 36 dxc6 37 dxc6 38 dxc6 39 dxc6 40 dxc6 41 dxc6 42 dxc6 43 dxc6 44 dxc6 45 dxc6 46 dxc6 47 dxc6 48 dxc6 49 dxc6 50 dxc6 51 dxc6 52 dxc6 53 dxc6 54 dxc6 55 dxc6 56 dxc6 57 dxc6 58 dxc6 59 dxc6 60 dxc6 61 dxc6 62 dxc6 63 dxc6 64 dxc6 65 dxc6 66 dxc6 67 dxc6 68 dxc6 69 dxc6 70 dxc6 71 dxc6 72 dxc6 73 dxc6 74 dxc6 75 dxc6 76 dxc6 77 dxc6 78 dxc6 79 dxc6 80 dxc6 81 dxc6 82 dxc6 83 dxc6 84 dxc6 85 dxc6 86 dxc6 87 dxc6 88 dxc6 89 dxc6 90 dxc6 91 dxc6 92 dxc6 93 dxc6 94 dxc6 95 dxc6 96 dxc6 97 dxc6 98 dxc6 99 dxc6 100 dxc6

25 c6 ♖e8 26 ♜xb5 1-0 R.Spielmann-S.Landau, Amsterdam 1933.

White is still winning with this kind of attack today – sometimes even faster!

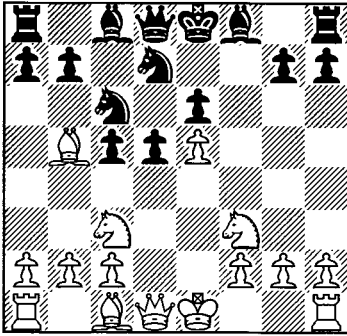
6 ♜f3 ♜c6 7 ♜b5



7...e5

Black returns a pawn to try to free himself, but the exposed king is still there. Another of our stubborn heroes (Sergeev) tried giving it back in another way: 7...g6 8 dxc5 ♙g7 (but not 8...♜xc5? 9 ♜d4 and White wins by fork and pin combined!) 9 ♙e3 ♜a5 (Black has his chances in the ensuing play, but this is Hector’s kind of position, and he outplays his opponent in the complications) 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♜b1 a6 12 ♙xc6 bxc6 13 ♜e1 ♜c7 14 ♙g5 ♙e5 15 ♙d4 ♜f5 16 ♙h3 ♙f7 17 ♙xg7 ♙xg7 18 ♙a4 e5 19 ♙b6 ♜b8 20 c4 ♙e6 21 b4 ♜h5 22 ♙f4 exf4 23 ♜xe6 f3 24 g3 ♙g5 25 cxd5 ♙xe6 26 dxe6 ♜f8 27 ♜b3 ♜e5 28 ♙d7 ♜d8 29 ♜e3 ♜d5 30 ♙xf3 ♙xf3 31 ♜xf3 and White eventually won the two pawns for the exchange ending in J.Hector-V.Sergeev, Berlin 1995.

8 dxe5 e6



9 ♖g5!

A direct attack against Black's enforced weakness at e6.

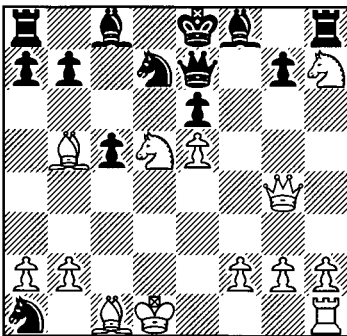
9...♞d4

If 9...♞dxe5, 10 ♖e2 gives White good compensation.

10 ♖g4! ♖e7 11 ♖xh7!

Hector clears the short diagonal that leads to the black king. A rook or more is not too much to give for one good check, like the one we'll see on move 15.

11...♞xc2+ 12 ♔d1 ♞xa1 13 ♞xd5!!



White has a winning attack.

13...exd5 14 ♕g5 ♖xe5

If 14...♖f7 15 e6 wins everything.

15 ♖h5+ 1-0

I wouldn't want to be on the black side of 3 e5! against Hector, or anyone who has studied his games. On the other hand, I'd take up 1 e4 myself if I knew that all my Alekhine foes were going to answer 2 ♞c3 with 2...d5?!.

Game 70

A. Matikozian-T. Taylor

Las Vegas 2005

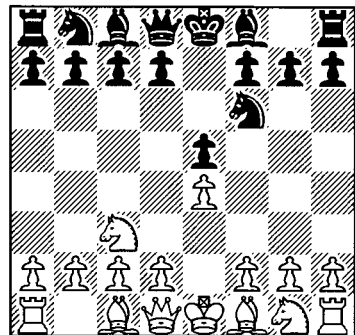
1 e4 ♞f6

The North American Open is one of those big American Swiss system events where it's necessary to win with both colours. At this point in the tournament my score wasn't quite what it needed to be, and I really needed to win – and my opponent was a strong IM against whom I had a poor score. What to play? The fighting Alekhine!

2 ♞c3

Or not.

2...e5!



I am now the first Alekhine Defence author to put an Open Game in an Alekhine Defence book!

Clearly I cannot go into all the double king pawn openings that can be reached via this move order, but some general remarks are certainly appropriate: If one comes to an Open Game in the usual way, after 1 e4 e5, I think there's no doubt that the three strongest second moves are 2 d3, 2 f4 or 2 d4. Note, coincidentally, all three of these immediately attack the e5-pawn, and Black must quickly take measures before his centre is overrun. On the other hand, after 1 e4 e5 2 d3 (the Vienna Game, to which we have now transposed – for the moment) gives Black a breather, time to make a useful developing move such as 2...d6, reaching the position in the game. The Vienna is hardly played at a high level today for just this reason, as it is thought, with considerable justification, that Black can equalize fairly easily. So by playing 2...e5 in this Alekhine Declined, Black avoids the horrible Hectoring of 2...d5 3 e5! and pushes White into a far less dangerous line in which the second player – with a bit of knowledge to be sure – should be able to equalize rather easily.

The above comments also give a hint as to why I think 2...e5 is best here, as compared to the also playable 2...e6 and 2...d6. While I regard these as both superior to 2...d5, Black will have either to contend with a main line French (1

e4 d6 2 d3 e6 3 d4 d5) or a main line Pirc (1 e4 d6 2 d3 d6 3 d4 g6). In both cases White can play the strongest lines available against those respective openings. However, when one transposes to 1 e4 e5 via the Alekhine (1 e4 d6 2 d3 e5), as in the game, White has already lost perhaps his most important main line option, 2 d3.

3 d3

White could stay in the Vienna Game with 3 g3, 3 f4 or 3 c4 – these options will be considered in the next game. With the text move the Vienna is gone, and we are entering the Three Knights Game.

3...d6

Black could stay in the Three Knights Game with 3...b4, as in this classical Alekhine win: 4 dxe5 e7 5 d3 xc3 6 dxc3 dxe4 7 e2 d5 8 0-0 0-0 9 d4 c6 10 c4 dxc4 11 xc4 f5 12 e2 e8 13 e1 d7 14 e3 b5 15 ad1 c7 16 d3 d7 17 f3 d6 18 g4 xd3 19 xxd3 d5! 20 f1 (20 xxd6 xxd6 21 xd6 dxf3+ is good for Black) 20...dxc4 21 c1 a5 22 e2 xa2 23 de1 f6 24 d3 f8 25 b3 d6 26 dxe5 fe5 27 g2 ae8 28 f4 e4 29 f5 a1 30 g3 d7 31 c3 b4! (a typical Alekhine counter-attack – the black queen finds its way back into the game) 32 b2 a5 33 xe4 xe4 34 xe4 d5 35 e2 d1+ 36 e1 xb3 37 cxb4 g5 38 c3 h3+ 39 f1 d1+ 40 e1 d5 41 e4 g5 42 c3 f6 43 d4 h1+ 44 e2 xh2+ 45

♙d1 h5 46 ♚d7 ♜f7 47 g5 ♖g1+ 48 ♜e1 ♚d6+ 49 ♚xd6 ♜xe1+ 50 ♙xe1 ♜xd6 51 f6 gxf6 52 ♙xf6 ♙f7 53 ♙d4 a6 54 ♙e2 ♙g6 55 ♙d3 ♙xg5 56 ♙e5 ♜f5 57 ♙c4 h4 58 ♙h2 ♙g4 59 ♙c5 ♙h3 60 ♙c7 ♙g2 61 ♙xc6 h3 62 ♙b6 ♜g3 63 ♙xa6 h2 64 b5 h1♚ 65 b6 ♜e4 66 b7 ♜c5+ 0-1 S.Alapin-A.Alekhine, Karlsbad 1911.

All very impressive, but as Alekhine himself admits, White had the initiative in the opening and could have obtained the better game with the simple 15 ♙b3 – as opposed to trying to outplay Alekhine in complications!

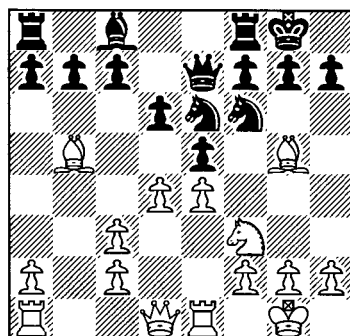
4 d4

Name that opening continues! With the text White tries to transpose to a sleepy variation of the Scotch, usually reached via 1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 d4 exd4 4 ♜d4 ♜f6 5 ♜c3 – a “calm, positional and somewhat harmless game,” writes Jan Pinski in his excellent book *The Four Knights*.

Instead, 4 ♙b5 is the Spanish Four Knights Game. Black's main counters are the classical 4...♙b4 and Rubinstein's gambit 4...♜d4. I would have played the former, given my tournament position, as White can practically force a draw, if he likes, in the Rubinstein variation: 5 ♜xd4 exd4 6 e5 dxc3 7 exf6 ♜xf6 8 dxc3 ♜e5+ 9 ♙e2 ♜xe2+ 10 ♙xe2 d5 11 ♙f4 c6 12 0-0-0 ½-½ P.Leko-S.Karjakin, Dortmund (blitz play-off) 2004, is a typical modern GM-GM encounter.

After 4...♙b4 the normal continua-

tion is 5 0-0 d6 6 d3 0-0 7 ♙g5 ♙xc3 8 bxc3 ♜e7 9 ♚e1 ♜d8 10 d4 ♜e6, a manoeuvre that has been known for over a hundred years – Black sets up a solid position, then looks for a chance to counter-attack. Let's see an ancient and modern example:



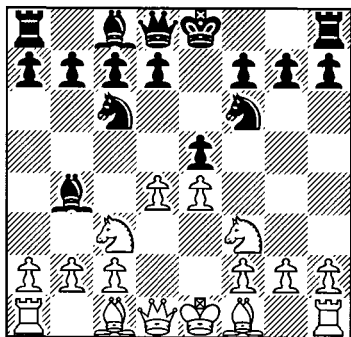
Ancient: 11 ♙c1 c6 12 ♙d3 ♜c7 13 h3 ♚e8 14 ♜g5 ♜xg5 15 ♙xg5 ♜d7 16 ♜f3 f6 17 ♙d2 ♜f8 (Black sets up a solid position and defends) 18 ♜g3 ♙h8 19 f4 ♜g6 20 f5 ♜e7 21 dxe5 dxe5 22 ♜h4 ♜g8 23 ♙h1 b6 24 ♚g1 ♙b7 25 ♚ae1 ♚ad8 26 ♙c1 ♜f7 27 a3 ♚e7 28 ♙e2 c5 29 ♙h5 ♜c4 (Black sees no mate and counter-attacks) 30 ♙g6 h6 31 ♚e3 ♚ed7 32 ♙h5 ♜a4 33 ♚e2 ♚d1 34 ♚ge1 ♙a6 35 ♚e3 ♜xe1+ 36 ♜xe1 ♜xc2 37 ♙h2 ♚d3 38 ♚xd3 ♙xd3 39 ♙f3 ♜e7 40 ♙d2 ♜a4 41 ♙xh6 ♜xf5!! (having allowed White's combination, Black avoids 41...gxh6 42 ♜e3 with an attack, and proposes instead 42 exf5 gxh6 43 ♜e3 ♜f4+ with a winning ending) 42 ♙c1 ♜d6 43 ♜h4+ ♙g8 44 ♙g4 ♜xe4 45 ♙e6+ ♜f7 46 ♜h5 ♜g6 47 ♜f3 ♙e4 48 ♜e2 f5 49 ♙b3 f4 50 ♙h1 ♙f8

Alekhine Alert!

51 ♖xf7 ♖xf7 52 ♖b2 ♜f5 53 ♖g1 f3
54 ♜f2 ♜g6 55 g3 ♖c6 56 ♖h2 ♜e4 57
♖c1 ♜e2 58 ♜xe2 fxe2 59 ♖d2 e4 0-1
H.Wolf-M.Vidmar, Vienna 1907. Yes,
that's how they played, back in the day!

Modern: Now our top players can't
do any such long-winded manoeuvres
– not only must they play blitz, the in-
evitable blunders are published! 11
♖h4 ♜d8 12 ♖d3 ♖f8 13 ♖d2 ♖g6 14
♖g3 c5 15 dxc5 dxc5 16 ♜e2 ♖g4
(Black is already a little better, as the
white bishops are not active, and
White's queenside pawns are a long-
term weakness) 17 f3 ♖e6 18 ♖c4 ♖h5
19 ♖e3 ♖hf4 20 ♜f1 ♜g5 21 c4 h5 22
♖d5 h4 23 ♖xf4 ♖xf4 24 ♖h1 b6 25
♜f2 ♖h5 26 ♜g1 (a typical blitz over-
sight; White is somewhat worse after
26 ♖c7, but still playing) 26...♖g3+! 0-1
A.Shirov-V.Salov, Wijk aan Zee (blitz)
1998.

4...♖b4



Name that opening concludes: I
avoid the Scotch and push the opening
back into Four Knights territory, which
is my sharpest option.

So the opening morphing went as
follows: Alekhine - Vienna - Three
Knights Game - Four Knights Game -
Scotch - Four Knights Game again, and
for good!

I think the reader should take a look
at some old books on these ancient
openings before you do venture 1...♖f6.
These lines weren't very terrifying in
1907, and still aren't in 2009, but one
should have some basic knowledge just
in case your Alekhine is declined.

5 d5

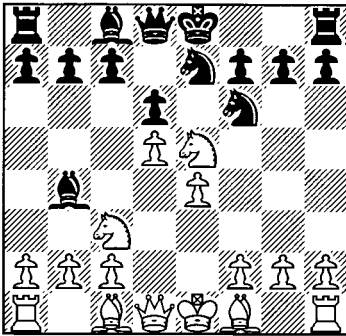
"After this move Black has a good
game," says the above-mentioned Pin-
ski, and I agree. White is not threaten-
ing to win a pawn by bumping the c6-
knight (because of the counter-
pressure on e4), so closing the position
just takes the pressure off and allows
Black counterplay. On the other hand,
the move can't be criticized that much,
since after this much quiet play White
no longer has any chances of a real ad-
vantage:

a) 5 ♖xe5 is more popular, but after
5...♜e7 Black has no problems; e.g. 6
♖xc6 (if 6 ♜d3 Black shows a point of
...♜e7 with the following tactical trick:
6...♖xd4! 7 ♜xd4 ♖c5 8 ♜d3 ♜xe5 9
♖e3 ♖xe3 10 ♜xe3 0-0 11 f4 ♜a5 and
Black is at least equal) 6...♜xe4+ 7 ♖e2
♖xc3+ (7...dxc6 8 0-0 ♜h4, mentioned
by Pinski, is sharper) 8 bxc3 ♜xc6 9 0-0
0-0 10 c4 d5 11 cxd5 ♖xd5 12 ♖d3 ♖b4
13 ♖a3 ♖xd3 14 ♜xd3 (after 14 ♖xf8
♖f4 15 d5 ♜g6 16 ♜f3 ♖h3! Black's
attack is worth more than White's

temporary material advantage) 14...♖e8 15 d5 ♖g6 16 ♖c3 ♗f5 17 ♖xc7 ½-½ S.Lalic-C.Flear, Chambery 1995.

b) 5 dxe5 ♗xe4 also gives Black a good game; e.g. 6 ♖d3 d5 7 exd6 0-0! (Black already has a strong attack) 8 ♗e2 (if 8 dxc7 ♖xd3 9 ♗xd3 ♗xc3 wins a piece) 8...♗f5 9 0-0 ♗xc3 10 ♖xf5 ♗xe2+ 11 ♖h1 ♗xc1 12 dxc7 ♖xc7 13 ♗g5 g6 14 ♖h3 h5 15 ♖axc1 ♗d2 16 ♗e6 fxe6 17 ♖xe6+ ♖f7 18 ♖xf7+ ♖xf7 19 ♖cd1 ♗d8 20 c3 ♖fd7 0-1 M.Loczy-J.Antal, Hungarian Team Ch. 1997.

5...♗e7 6 ♗xe5 d6



7 ♗f3

7 ♗b5+ forces the black king to move, but leaves White with numerous pawn weaknesses; even a world-class player like Hort lost the white side of this: 7...♗f8 (but not 7...c6 8 dxc6 0-0 9 ♗d7! – now that's a Tal move! – 9...♗xd7 10 cxd7 ♗xe4 11 ♖d4 ♗xc3 12 ♖xb4 ♗cd5 13 ♖b3 ♗b6 14 0-0 ♗xd7 15 ♗g5 and White's two bishops led to a win in M.Tal-A.Smatlanek, Prague simul 1960) 8 ♗d3 ♗xc3+ 9 bxc3 ♗xe4

and Black was already better in V.Hort-P.Trifunovic, Sarajevo 1964, as White's bishop on b5 is misplaced and the c- and d-pawns are weak.

7...♗xe4 8 ♖d4 ♗xc3

Weaker is 8...♗xc3+ 9 bxc3, when White gets some compensation for his broken pawns with the two bishops.

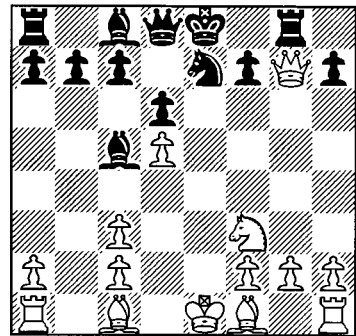
9 bxc3

If 9 ♖xb4 ♗cxd5 nets a pawn for Black.

9...♗c5!

Stronger than 9...♗a5, as now the bishop has a permanent protected square (courtesy of White's doubled pawns) and menaces the white king whether it castles kingside, queenside, or stays in the centre.

10 ♖xg7 ♖g8



11 ♖h6

11 ♖xh7 is very risky, since Black can attack with all his forces (but shouldn't pause to snatch pawns!). Best is 11...♗f5 12 ♖h5 ♖d7 (12...♗g4 13 ♖h7 ♗f5 with a draw is Fritz's unhelpful suggestion) 13 ♗g5, and now Black should play 13...0-0-0 with a tre-

Alekhine Alert!

mendous attack similar to the main game, rather than the materialistic 13...♙xc2?! which eventually led to Black's loss in A.De Dovitiis-M.Vazquez, Buenos Aires 2001.

11...♙f5 12 ♙g5 ♖d7 13 ♙d3

White's king gets caught in the centre after 13 ♙xe7 ♖xe7+ 14 ♙d2 ♙xf2, which is much better for Black.

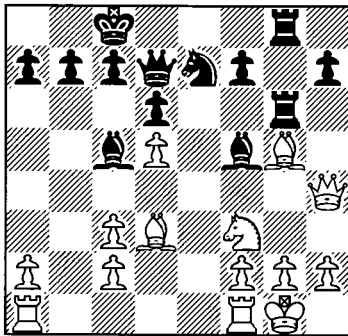
13...0-0-0

Black has a beautiful development and attacking chances on both sides of the board, more than enough for one pawn.

14 0-0

Not 14 ♙xf5?! ♙xf5 15 ♖h3 (if 15 ♖xh7? ♖h8 traps the queen) 15...♗de8+ 16 ♙f1? (but if 16 ♙d2 ♙xf2) 16...♖b5+ 17 ♙g1 ♙xf2+! 18 ♙xf2 ♗e2+ 19 ♙g1 ♗xg5 20 ♙xg5 ♖c5+ 21 ♙f1 ♖f2 mate!

14...♗g6 15 ♖h4 ♗dg8!!



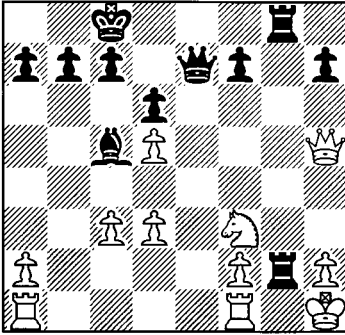
The computer gives 15...f6 and, after the following moves which represent best play in the silicon nation, claims Black has the wonderful equals over plus, though it doesn't look like much of anything to me: 16 ♙d2 ♗dg8

17 ♙e1 ♙xd5 18 ♖h5 ♙xd3 19 cxd3 f5 20 g3 etc.

Whereas my move – played instantly for maximum shock – was a huge psychological blow, as it's evident Black has a tremendous attack, and it's virtually impossible for a human being under time limit (the logic of this and many other examples of real or Spielmann sacrifices) to find any way out, or in this case, a very very precise path to equality.

16 ♗fe1?

After a long think my opponent declined the sacrifice, but this was a fatal mistake. Despite the many very real dangers, taking was correct, when Mr. Fritz claims to find equality if White doesn't make a single misstep: 16 ♙xe7! (White steps out on a very narrow plank) 16...♗g4! (but not 16...♗xg2+? 17 ♙h1 ♙xd3 18 cxd3 ♖f5 19 ♖e4 ♖h3 20 ♙h4 and White wins – Black too must be accurate) 17 ♖h5! (the seemingly plausible 17 ♖f6 keeps the bishop defended but loses as follows: 17...♙xd3 18 cxd3 ♗xg2+ 19 ♙h1 ♖h3 20 ♗g1 ♙xf2! and Black has a winning attack with threats of both 21...♙xg1 and 21...♖xf3!, to which White has no defence; while 17 ♙xf5 crashes and burns after 17...♖xf5 18 ♖h3 ♗xg2+ 19 ♖xg2 ♗xg2+ 20 ♙xg2 ♖g4+ 21 ♙h1 ♖xf3+ 22 ♙g1 ♖g4+ 23 ♙h1 ♖e4+ and Black picks up the bishop for a decisive material advantage) 17...♗xg2+ 18 ♙h1 ♙xd3 19 cxd3 ♖xe7.



Even if White got this far in his calculations (very difficult calculations indeed) it would be surprising if he correctly evaluated it as equal, as Black has recovered his piece and has strong threats on the seventh rank – nonetheless 20 ♖g1! holds. Just try to find this hidden future resource while beset by “sacrificial shock”! After this surprising defence, Black plays 20...♙xg1+ 21 ♙xg1 ♙xg1+ 22 ♙xg1 ♙f6 23 ♙g2 ♙g6+ (but not 23...♙xc3? 24 ♙g4+ ♙d8 25 d4 ♙b6 26 ♙g8+ ♙e7 27 ♙g5 and White has a winning attack) 24 ♙xg6 fxg6 with an approximately even ending.

16...♙xd5

Now I’ve recovered my pawn with a continuing attack.

17 c4 ♙xd3 18 cxd3

Not 18 cxd5? ♙xc2.

18...h6!

The best way to open the g-file is...

19 cxd5 hxg5

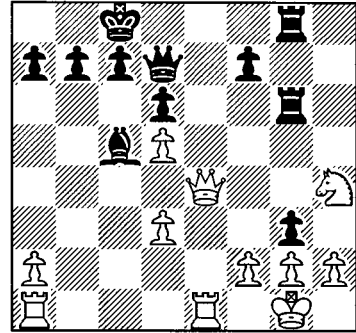
...to close it!

20 ♙e4

If 20 ♙g3 g4 21 ♙d2 ♙f5 and Black

wins a good pawn.

20...g4 21 ♙h4 g3!



The g-file opens like a phoenix’s wings. White has no time to take the rook, as 22 ♙xg6? gxf2+ wins a piece.

22 hxg3 ♙xg3 23 ♙f1

Black wins the ending after 23 ♙e2 ♙h3 (how’s that for an assortment of pins!) 24 ♙ae1 (if 24 ♙f5+, 24...♙xf5 25 ♙xf5 ♙xg2+ 26 ♙h1 ♙d7 is decisive) 24...b5! (not 24...♙3g4?? 25 ♙e8+ ♙xe8 26 ♙xe8+ ♙d7 27 ♙1e7 mate) 25 ♙f5+ (forced, due to the threat of ...♙3g4) 25...♙xf5 26 ♙xf5 ♙xg2+ 27 ♙h1 ♙b7 and White has no chance; e.g. 28 ♙h6 ♙8g6 29 ♙xf7 ♙b6 30 ♙d1 (or 30 ♙f1 ♙g7 31 ♙d8 ♙2g6 with a mating attack) 30...♙xf2 31 ♙xf2 ♙xf2 32 ♙c1 ♙c5 33 ♙c2 ♙f6 34 ♙d8 ♙f1+ 35 ♙g2 ♙d1 36 ♙c3 b4 37 ♙b3 a5 38 ♙e6 a4 39 ♙b2 ♙xd3 with two extra pawns.

23...♙3g4 24 ♙h7 ♙d4!

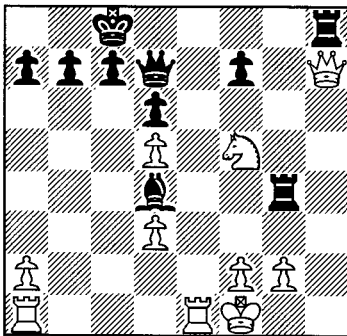
Black is winning: the threats of ...♙h8 and ...♙xa1 cannot both be met.

25 ♙f5

Other tries also fail; e.g. 25 ♙e4 (if 25 ♙ab1 ♙h8 26 ♙f5 ♙gxh4, or 25 f3

Alekhine Alert!

♙h8 26 ♖xh8+ ♕xh8 27 fxg4 ♕xa1 28 ♖xa1 ♖xg4 29 ♖f3 ♖f5 30 ♖d1 ♖xd5) 25...♗xe4 26 dxe4 (26 ♖xg8+ ♖e8 27 ♖h7 ♕xa1 and 26 ♖xe4 ♕xa1 are equally hopeless) 26...♗h8 27 ♖f5 ♕xa1 – in every line Black emerges with a decisive material advantage.
25...♗h8 0-1



White resigns in view of the loss of major material; e.g. 26 ♖e7+ ♗d8 27 ♖xf7 (27 ♖f5 ♖xf5 28 ♖xf5 ♕xa1 29 ♖xa1 ♗h1+ is similar) 27...♗xa1 28 ♖xa1 (if 28 ♖g1 ♗g7 skewers) 28...♗h1+ 29 ♖e2 ♖xa1 30 ♖f8+ ♖e8 and the two extra rooks are enough!

What's interesting about this game is how White clearly didn't like the openings he was getting: after 1...♖f6, he declined an Alekhine; after 2...e5 he was unhappy with the Vienna; then tried to escape the Four Knights and get a Scotch – only to end up in a side-line of the Four Knights for which he was not prepared ...and even if he had been prepared, that opening would not have given him any "White" advantage.

Compare this to White's fun and aggressive possibilities after 2...d5 3 e5!.

Clearly 2...e5 is the way to go.

Game 71 A.Shirov-V.Kramnik Monte Carlo (blindfold rapid) 2005

1 e4

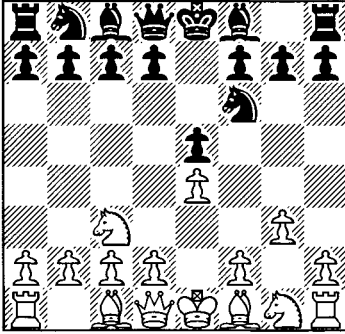
White can try to sneak into the Vienna – or avoid the Alekhine – with the following curious move order, but as one sees, the Latvian GM Rausis takes over the advantage on move 4 (!) and doesn't relax after that, delivering a horrible crush: 1 ♖c3 ♖f6 2 g3 d5 3 ♕g2 e5 4 e4 (see the note to White's 4th in the main game for a transpositional possibility) 4...♕g4! 5 f3 ♕e6 6 d3 ♖c6 7 exd5 ♖xd5 8 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 9 ♕e3 ♕c5 10 ♕xc5 ♖xc5 11 ♖d2 0-0-0 12 ♖e2 ♖b8 13 ♖c3 ♖d4 14 b4 ♖b6 15 a4 ♕h3! 16 a5 ♖xb4 17 ♖f2 ♕xg2 18 ♖xg2 ♖b5 19 ♖e4 ♖xd2+ 20 ♖xd2 ♖d4 21 ♖a2 ♖d5 22 c4 ♖d7 23 ♖b1 ♖e6 24 ♖ab2 c6 25 a6 b6 26 c5 ♖xc5 27 ♖c4 f6 28 ♖xb6 axb6 29 ♖xb6+ ♖c7 30 a7 ♖dd8 0-1 A.De Bruijn-I.Rausis, Haarlem 1997.

1...e5 2 ♖c3 ♖f6

Of course the Alekhine order is 1 e4 ♖f6 2 ♖c3 e5!. I'm putting this game in as I think you're very likely to get a Vienna if your opponent declines your Alekhine with 2 ♖c3 – and you answer

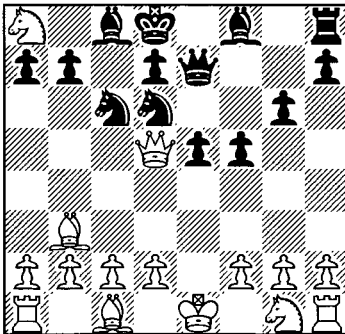
correctly with 2...e5! – and who better to demonstrate how to play than the recent World Champion himself, Vladimir Kramnik!

3 g3



Besides this passive but popular move, White has two other “Vienna” possibilities:

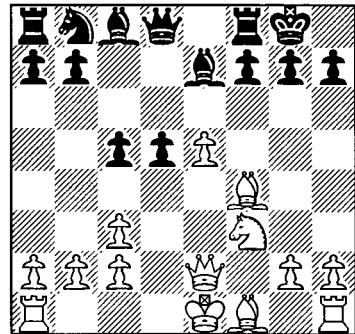
a) 3 ♖c4 ♜e4 (3...♜c6 is the solid move, but it’s worth taking a look at this fabulous Frankenstein-Dracula Variation – with Jonny Hector, our Alekhine slayer, now taking the black side!) 4 ♜h5 ♜d6 5 ♖b3 ♜c6 6 ♜b5 g6 7 ♜f3 f5 8 ♜d5 ♜e7 9 ♜xc7+ ♜d8 10 ♜xa8



(that’s a whole rook for the moment, but the white knight has no exit visa and the queen is a target for Black’s active minor pieces) 10...b6 11 h4 ♖b7 12 ♜f3 ♖xa8 13 ♜e2 ♖g7 14 ♜h3 ♜f8 15 ♜c3 ♜d4 16 0-0 f4 17 d3 ♜f5 18 ♜e1 ♜h5 19 ♖xf4 ♜xh4 20 ♜g3 ♜6f5 21 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 22 ♜xe5 ♜f3+ 23 gxf3 ♜xe5 0-1 M.Simmons-J.Hector, Jersey 2003. White will be mated after 24 ♜xe5 ♖xf3.

Hector himself plays the Vienna, often the old main line with 3 f4 – it’s his usual answer when he declines the Alekhine and his opponent takes the open road with 2...e5. Unfortunately for White, such problems as the Vienna presented were pretty much worked out about a century ago, so the question is mainly whether the opponent is familiar with the opening – as we see here, facing the well-prepared Argentine GM Campora, Hector gets nothing:

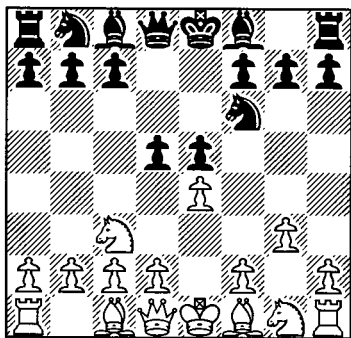
b) 3 f4 d5 (the only good move – Black fights back in the centre) 4 fxe5 ♜xe4 5 ♜f3 ♖e7 6 ♜e2 ♜xc3 7 dxc3 0-0 8 ♖f4 c5



Alekhine Alert!

(Black has a good position reminiscent of Game 66) 9 0-0-0 ♖c6 10 c4 d4 11 ♖e4 ♜e8 12 h4 g6 13 ♙h6? (a mistake; 13 h5 ♙f5 would have led to a roughly equal, double-edged game) 13...♙f6 14 g4 ♗xe5 15 ♗xe5 ♙xe5 16 ♙d3 ♙g7 17 ♖f4 ♖f6 18 ♜hg1 ♙d7? (a baffling move which allows White to keep the queens on – after the natural 18...♖xf4+ 19 ♙xf4 White would just be a clear pawn down in the ending) 19 ♖d2 (now Hector is able to complicate his way to a draw) 19...♙xh6 20 ♖xh6 ♖f2 21 ♙b1 ♜e7 22 h5 ♜ae8 23 a3 ♜e1 24 hxg6 fxg6 25 ♙xg6 ♜xg1 26 ♖xh7+ ♙f8 27 ♜xg1 ♖xg1+ 28 ♙a2 ♖f1 29 ♖h8+ ♙e7 30 ♖e5+ ♙e6 31 ♖xc5+ ♙d8 32 ♖xd4+ ♙d7 33 ♙xe8 ♙xe8 34 g5 ♙e6 35 b3 ♖g2 36 ♙b2 a6 37 ♖f6 ♖e4 38 a4 ♙f5 39 ♖c3 ♙d7 40 b4 a5 41 ♖d3+ ♖xd3 42 cxd3 ♙xd3 43 ♙c3 ♙b1 ½-½ J.Hector-D.Campora, Royan 1988.

3...d5



In my view this is both simplest and best, and it has been used to fight for a win by world champions from Lasker to Kramnik!

“The idea behind 3...d5 is to exploit the lack of threat in White’s second and third moves by gaining an advantage in the centre,” writes IM Jack Peters in *Understanding the Open Games*, which basically says it all. Yes, neither White’s second nor third move threatened *anything*. Compare this to White’s second and third moves in the Ruy Lopez: 1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3! ♗c6 3 ♙b5!.

So given White’s passivity, I feel Black is completely justified in taking over the initiative at once. The only danger is that White’s fianchettoed bishop now has a longer diagonal, but Black has various ways to neutralize this one good piece, as the main game and notes reveal.

4 exd5

White has to give up his centre, as obviously 4 d3 dxe4 is at least a little better for Black, and 4 ♙g2 ♙g4! transposes to the Rausis crush given above.

4...♗xd5 5 ♙g2 ♗xc3 6 bxc3 ♗c6

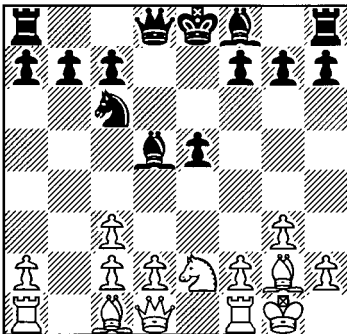
This simple developing move may be best, though a “Great Predecessor” shows a different method: 6...c6 (immediately blocking White’s only trump, the fianchettoed bishop) 7 d4?! (7 ♗f3 is better) 7...exd4 8 ♖xd4 (if 8 cxd4, 8...♙b4+ forces White to move his king) 8...♙e7 (White finds that his opening is already refuted, as he can’t take on g7 due to 9...♙f6, and otherwise has no compensation for his doubled pawns – especially against Lasker!) 9 ♗e2 0-0 10 0-0 ♙f6 11 ♖d3 ♖a5 12 ♙e4 ♜d8 13 ♙xh7+? (desperation – 13 ♖e3 ♗a6 is

just good for Black, but now White is lost) 13...♔h8 14 ♖e4 ♗h5 15 ♛c4 ♗xh7 16 ♛xf7 ♘d7 17 f4 ♜f8 18 ♛c4 ♘b6 19 ♛c5 ♙h3 20 ♜f2 ♜fd8 21 ♙e3 ♜d5 22 ♛a3 ♜ad8 23 ♙d4 c5 24 ♙xf6 ♜d1+ 25 ♜f1 ♖e4 0-1 J.Mieses-Em.Lasker, Leipzig (8th matchgame) 1889. White resigns, as 26 ♙f2 ♗g2+ 27 ♙e3 ♘c4 is mate!

7 ♘e2 ♙e6

Another smash from the past is 7...♙c5 8 0-0 0-0 9 h3 ♙e6 10 ♔h2 ♙d5! (Black's key idea is always to neutralize White's light-squared bishop) 11 f3 ♙b6 12 d3 ♖e7 13 a4 ♜ad8 14 ♙a3 ♙c5 15 ♛c1 f5 16 ♜e1 ♜fe8 17 c4 ♙f7 18 ♘c3 ♙xa3 19 ♜xa3 ♖f6 20 ♜b3 b6 21 ♘e2 f4 (so much for the fianchettoed bishop!) 22 g4 h5 23 ♜f1 ♘d4 24 ♘xd4 exd4 25 ♜b5 c5 26 a5 ♜e2 27 ♙g1 ♜de8 28 axb6 axb6 29 h4 (a fatal attempt to break the bind) 29...♖xh4! 30 ♛xf4 ♜xg2+! (the only reason Pillsbury takes this dead bishop is to force mate!) 31 ♙xg2 ♜e2+ 32 ♙g1 ♖h3 0-1 F.Lee-H.Pillsbury, London 1899.

8 0-0 ♙d5

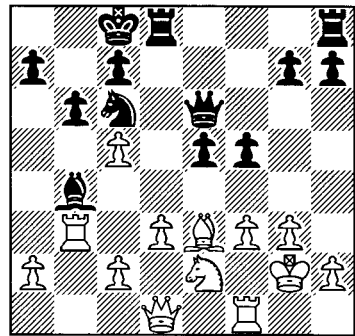


As we see from the Pillsbury game above, this idea has been known for over a hundred years: White either must bury his bishop (like Pillsbury's opponent) or exchange, as here, leaving weak light squares around his king. Black, with the better centre and better pawn structure, already has some advantage on move 8!

9 d3 ♙xg2 10 ♙xg2 ♗d5+ 11 f3 0-0-0 12 c4 ♖e6 13 ♙e3 ♙b4 14 ♜b1 f5

Black has completed his development and now goes over to the attack.

15 ♜b3 b6 16 c5



White tries complications which, as usual, favour the better developed and more centralized player. Shirov could also have suffered in silence with 16 a3 ♙e7 17 ♗d2.

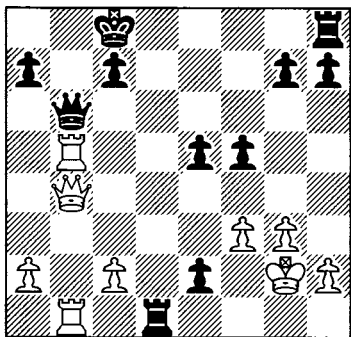
16...♙xc5 17 ♙xc5 bxc5 18 ♜b5 c4 19 ♜c5 ♘b4 20 ♗d2 cxd3! 21 ♖xb4 dxe2 22 ♜b1

Shirov should remember Nimzowitsch's words that passed pawns are "dangerous criminals" – best is to blockade with 22 ♜e1 when Black is better but not clearly winning.

22...♙b6 23 ♖b5

Attacking Black's queen with a three piece battery – but as we'll see, Kramnik doesn't move her – maybe he didn't "see" the threat?

23...♜d1!!



A great combination even in regular chess, but especially brilliant given that this was blindfold!

24 ♖xb6 axb6 25 ♙f2 e1B+!

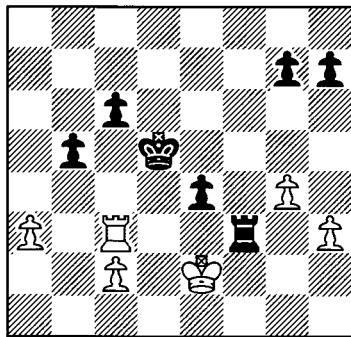
It's not every day one gets to promote to a bishop!

26 ♗xe1 ♜xe1 27 ♜xe1 ♜e8 28 g4 fxg4 29 fxg4 ♙d7

Black has an extra, passed pawn, and due to the ...♜xc3 capture in the opening, the white queenside pawns are still split. Kramnik wins with precise, all-seeing technique.

30 ♖e3 ♜f8+ 31 ♙e2 ♜f4 32 h3 ♙d6 33 ♜d3+ ♜d4 34 ♜f3 ♜e4+ 35 ♙d2 ♜f4 36 ♜e3 b5 37 ♙e2 ♙d5 38 ♖b3 c6 39 a3 e4! 0-1

White resigns, as all versions of the coming pawn ending are lost for him. After 40 ♜c3 (40 ♖b1 ♜f3 wins at once) Black plays 40...♜f3!! and then:



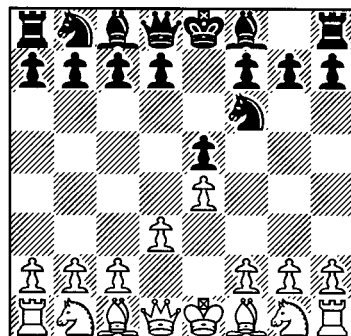
a) 41 ♖b3 ♜xb3 42 cxb3 c5 43 a4 (43 ♙e3 c4 44 bxc4+ ♙xc4 45 ♙xe4 ♙b3 is similar) 43...bxa4 44 bxa4 ♙c4 and in both lines Black gets a winning outside passed pawn.

b) 41 ♙d2 ♜xc3 42 ♙xc3 g5 43 ♙b3 (or 43 ♙d2 ♙d4 44 ♙e2 ♙c3 45 ♙d1 ♙b2 46 ♙d2 ♙xa3 wins) e3 44 ♙c3 ♙e4 and this time it's the e-pawn that wins.

c) 41 ♜xf3 exf3+ 42 ♙xf3 ♙c4 43 ♙f4 (or 43 ♙e2 ♙c3 44 ♙d1 ♙b2 and White's split queenside pawns, a legacy of the opening, are fatal – Black wins the a-pawn and will soon create a winning outside passed pawn) 43...♙c3 44 ♙e5 c5 and Black wins both races. The long race goes as follows: 45 ♙e6 ♙xc2 46 g5 g6 47 ♙f7 ♙b3 48 ♙g7 c4 49 ♙xh7 c3 50 ♙xg6 c2 51 h4 c1♙ 52 h5 ♙xa3 53 h6 b4 54 h7 ♙c3 55 ♙f7 b3 56 g6 b2 57 g7 b1♙ 58 g8♙ ♙f5+ 59 ♙e7 ♙c7+ 60 ♙e8 ♙fc8 mate! The short race is no better for White: 45 ♙d6 c4 46 ♙c5 ♙xc2 47 ♙xb5 ♙b3 and Black has time to queen and stop White's a-pawn.

In general, as far as the Open Games go, non-threatening lines like the Vienna are easily met by Black. The Alekhine player should study these lines (rather than trying to make 2...d5 work) and will then be able to face the popular but not so dangerous 2 ♖c3 with confidence.

We now proceed to the even more miserable (for White) 2 d3, which is far more popular than its objective merits would indicate.



3 ♖f3

“There is not even a semblance of an advantage for White” – Alekhine.

For the “only logical continuation” 3 f4 (Alekhine again) see the next game.

From a modern perspective, I should point out that White’s second move is often a prelude to what might be called “extreme defensive chess” which is very popular among young players and on the internet. For example, a recent blitz game of mine continued 3 c3 d5 4 ♗c2 (defence!) 4...♖c6 5 ♖e2 g6 6 ♖g3 (more defence!) 6...♗g7 and Black is clearly better, though it took until move 47 to register the 0-1, NN-Taylor, Internet (blitz) 2009.

Of course playing like this is nonsense from any point of view where White tries to obtain the advantage in the opening (indeed White is evidently worse in this sample by move 6), but if the White player is aiming for a draw he may sometimes reach a successful outcome, as the solid defensive structure can be hard to break down.

I would advise playing like Tal

Game 72

M.Todorcevic-M.Tal
Marseilles 1989

1 e4 ♖f6

The fearless Tal boldly essays Alekhine’s Defence, willing to let his knight be attacked in the hope of eventual counter-attack – and then...

2 d3

Blah.

“A very tame continuation, which does not offer prospects of any opening advantage” – Alekhine.

2...e5

Naturally other moves are possible; Alekhine himself not only played the text here, but also 2...c5, transposing to the Sicilian (and won against Sir George Thomas) – but that is a bit outside of our repertoire. While almost anything could be played against White’s pitifully passive move, I recommend the text as simplest and best.

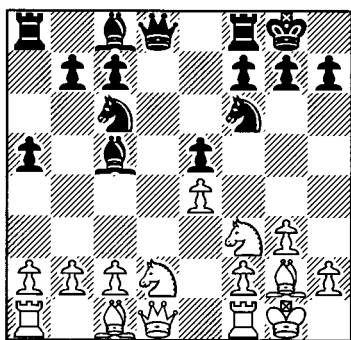
Alekhine Alert!

against such lines and resist trying to win in under 10 moves – as we will see in the main game, the wizard from Riga builds up carefully and waits to smash his opponent until move 18!

3...♖c6 4 ♙e2

White plays for the reversed Hanham Philidor – hardly terrifying.

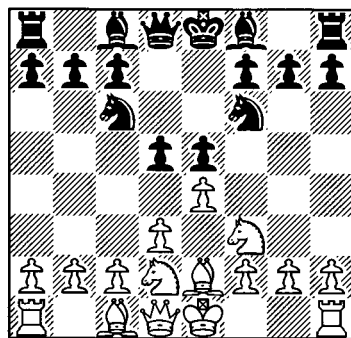
Another possibility is a reversed Pirc with 4 g3 d5 (also good, and shorter, was 4...g6 5 ♙g2 ♙g7 6 0-0 0-0 7 c3 d5 8 ♜c2 h6 9 b4 a6 10 ♙b2 ♙e6 ½-½ J.Seret-B.Finegold, Cappelle la Grande 1991 – an easy success for White!) 5 ♜bd2 ♙c5 6 ♙g2 dxe4 7 dxe4 0-0 8 0-0 a5



(obviously Black has no problems; Fritz even gives the second player a 0.22 advantage, which admittedly is not too much, but shows that Black is at least equal without doing anything but making simple, logical moves) 9 h3 a4 10 a3 ♜e7 11 c3 ♜d8 12 ♜h4 g6 13 ♜f3 ♜a5 14 ♜e1 ♜e8 15 ♜b1 ♙e6 16 ♜f1 ♜b3 17 ♙e3 ♙xe3 18 ♜xe3 ♜d6 19 ♜f3 ♜c4 20 ♜e2 f6 21 ♜ed1 ♜xd1 22 ♜xd1 ♜d8 23 ♜xd8+ ♜xd8 24 ♜e1

♜d6 25 ♜d3 ♙g7 (Black is a little better due to the his superior bishop and queenside play, though as we'll see, White's "relentless defence" manages to hold the draw) 26 ♜e3 ♙xe3 27 ♜xe3 b6 28 ♙f1 ♜a5 29 h4 ♜c4 30 ♜e2 ♜a5 31 ♜b4 ♙c4 32 ♜c2 b5 33 ♙e2 c6 34 ♙d3 ♙xd3 35 ♜xd3 ♜xd3 36 ♜xd3 ♜c4 37 f3 f5 38 ♙f2 ♙f6 39 g4 h6 40 ♙e2 fxg4 41 fxg4 ♙e6 42 ♜c5+ ♙d6 43 ♜d3 ♜b6 44 g5 hxg5 45 hxg5 ♜d7 46 ♜e1 ♜c5 47 ♙e3 ♜e6 48 ♜f3 ♜f4 49 ♙d2 ♜h3 50 ♙e3 c5 51 ♙e2 c4 52 ♙e3 ♜f4 53 ♜e1 ♙e7 54 ♙d2 ♙d7 55 ♙e3 ♙d6 56 ♙d2 ♜h3 57 ♜f3 ♜f2 58 ♙e3 ♜d3 59 ♙d2 ♙e6 60 ♜e1 ♜f2 61 ♙e3 ♜h3 62 ♜f3 ♜f4 63 ♙d2 ♙d6 64 ♜e1 ♜e6 65 ♜f3 ♜c5 66 ♙e3 ♜d3 67 ♙d2 ♜c5 ½-½ M.Lazic-J.Petronic, Ulcinj 1997 – a difficult success for White!

4...d5 5 ♜bd2

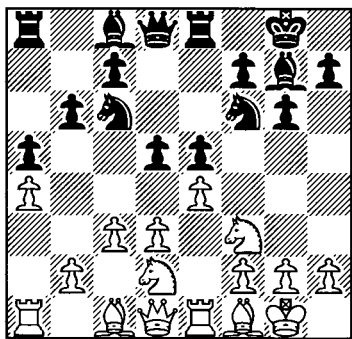


5...g6

This is good and solid, but there's nothing wrong with accepting White's invitation to a main line reversed Philidor with 5...♙c5: an extra tempo in this slow defence doesn't mean very much.

What is very interesting in the following game is that Black is GM Christian Bauer, author of *The Philidor Files* in which he advocates this defence for Black – yet here he takes the “White” side and demolishes his favourite opening while having a tempo less! 5...♖c5 6 0-0 0-0 7 c3 a5 8 a4 ♖e8 9 h3 ♖a7 10 ♖e1 h6 11 ♖f1 ♖e6 12 b3 ♜d7 13 ♖b2 ♜ad8 (Black has calmly developed and stands better – soon the French GM starts a vicious attack) 14 ♜b1 ♜h5 15 b4 dxe4 16 dxe4 ♜f4 17 b5 ♖xh3!! 18 gxh3 ♜xh3+ 19 ♖h2 (if 19 ♖xh3 ♜xh3 20 bxc6 ♖e6 mates) 19...♜f4 20 bxc6 ♜g4 21 ♖e3 ♖e6 22 ♜d4 ♜h4+ 23 ♖g1 exd4 24 cxd4 ♜g6+ 25 ♜g3 ♜xg3+ 26 fxg3 ♜xg3+ 27 ♖h1 ♜h4+ 28 ♖g1 ♜xd4! 0-1 T.Haub-C.Bauer, Vandoeuvre 2004.

6 0-0 ♖g7 7 c3 a5 8 a4 0-0 9 ♖e1 ♖e8 10 ♖f1 b6



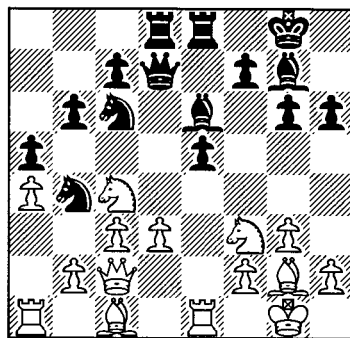
As usual, Black is already slightly better with his greater central control, plus the white weakness at d3 which Tal's last move targeted.

11 exd5 ♜xd5 12 ♜b3 ♜f4 13 ♜e4 ♖e6

14 ♜c2 ♜d5 15 g3 h6 16 ♖g2 ♜d7 17 ♜ed2 ♜ad8 18 ♜c4

Now Tal decides he has waited long enough!

18...♜db4!!



A stunning Tal combination, based on several tactical motifs: The white rooks are at a forking distance; the white knight on c4 is insecure; the white queen is the only good defender of the queenside and, once gone, Black has numerous attacking chances on that (for White) undeveloped side of the board; and finally, the weakness at d3 is crucial to the whole thing.

The combination reminds me of a similar Alekhine demolition: 1 e4 e5 2 ♜f3 ♜c6 3 ♖b5 a6 4 ♖a4 d6 5 0-0 ♖d7 6 c3 g6 7 d4 ♖g7 8 dxe5 dxe5 9 ♖e3 ♜f6 10 ♜bd2 ♜e7 11 b4 b6 12 h3 0-0 13 ♖b3 a5 14 b5 ♜d8 15 a4 ♜b7 16 ♖g5 ♜c5 17 ♖d5 ♜ad8 18 ♜c4 h6 19 ♖xf6 ♖xf6 20 ♜c1 ♖g7 21 ♜e3 ♜xa4! (“The decisive combination, quite in Alekhine’s style: a seemingly solid position is quickly broken up,” writes Imre Konig in *Chess From Morphy to Botvinnik*) 22

Alekhine Alert!

♖xa4 ♗xb5 23 ♖aa1 ♖xd5 24 exd5 ♗xc4 25 ♖fd1 ♖d8 26 ♗e4 ♗b3 27 ♖d2 ♗c5 28 ♗xe5 ♗xc3 0-1 E.Sergeant-A.Alekhine, Margate 1938. Poor Sergeant! Alekhine hammered him in Game 3 too!

And now back to Tal's combinative fury.

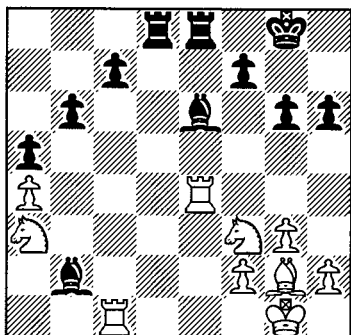
19 cxb4 ♗xb4 20 ♗c3 ♗xd3!

To exchange queens after sacrificing a piece is rare, but Tal sees the essence of the position: White's queenside is defenceless without his queen.

21 ♗a3 e4

With every piece attacking, Black is winning, despite the material deficit.

22 ♗xd3 ♗xd3 23 ♖xe4 ♗xc1 24 ♖xc1 ♗xb2



The crucial tactical point is revealed.

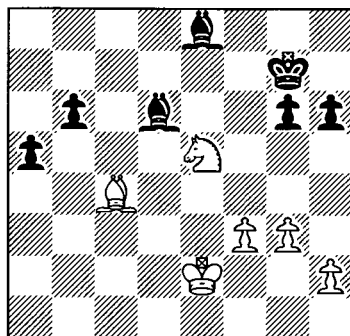
25 ♖xc7 ♖d1+ 26 ♖e1 ♖xe1+ 27 ♗xe1 ♗xa3

Winning with an extra pawn and the two bishops is not exactly a strain for Tal.

28 ♗d3 ♖d8 29 ♗f1 ♗f5 30 ♖c3 ♗b4 31 ♖b3

If 31 ♗xb4 axb4 32 ♖b3, 32...♖d4 followed by ...♗e6 wins.

31...♖d4 32 f3 ♗d7 33 ♗f2 ♗xa4 34 ♖b2 ♗e7 35 ♗e3 ♖d6 36 ♗e5 ♖d1 37 ♗c4 ♖e1+ 38 ♖e2 ♗c5+ 39 ♗d3 ♖xe2 40 ♗xe2 ♗g7 41 ♗xf7 ♗e8 42 ♗e5 ♗d6 0-1



White resigns in view of 43 f4 b5 44 ♗d5 a4 and the pawns roll through.

It's difficult for me to understand why White would play an opening (2 d3) where he is barely equal and often worse after any reasonable moves by Black, but as an Alekhine player you will get this, as I have myself (see the note to move 7 in the following game).

Game 73 G.Maróczy-A.Alekhine New York 1924

1 e4

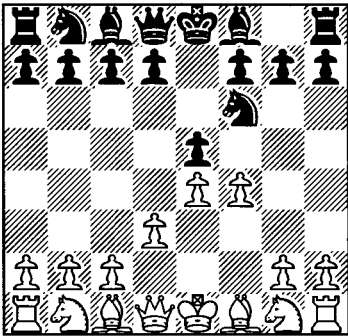
It occurred to me that, while the position after 1...♗f6 2 d3 is quite common (as people will make any kind of bad move to avoid the "dreaded" Alekhine's Defence), I didn't think *anyone* would play 1 e4 e5 2 d3 – so I

looked it up in the *Mega*. To my amazement, this too is quite a common move, and there is even a strong player, the Russian IM Vorotnikov, who plays this at every opportunity and reaches the key second move position from 1 e4 e5 2 d3 ♖f6, as well as the Alekhine order 1 e4 ♖f6 2 d3 e5 – and scores a perfectly reasonable 55% with it. Of course the great majority of his games are draws, but he wins now and then – he even beat Kengis! – some of his typical draws and the Kengis win are referenced in the notes.

1...♖f6 2 d3

There are 1778 games with this in the database! As you might guess, even with Vorotnikov's help White scores only 48% overall with this move, but that's close enough to fifty to encourage the legion of "please let me draw with White" players!

2...e5 3 f4



At least in this historical game Maróczy tries "the only logical continuation" (as Alekhine stated).

3...♖c6

Vorotnikov Draw #1: 3...d5?! 4 fxe5 ♗g4 5 exd5 ♘xe5 6 ♖c3 ♙b4 7 ♖f3 ♙g4 8 ♙e2 ♜xd5 9 0-0 ♙xc3 10 bxc3 ♙xf3 11 ♙xf3 ♖xf3+ 12 ♜xf3 looks slightly better for White, as the white bishop is stronger than the black knight and the open files for the rooks outweigh the doubled pawns. In fact this is a typical Vorotnikov position, where he either wins or draws. Note that Black starts bravely with the Alekhine's, continues boldly with the gambit 3...d5 – and then, after all that, must defend a plus equals position and hope to draw! So I don't recommend this line for Black, but rather Alekhine's main line, 3...♖c6.

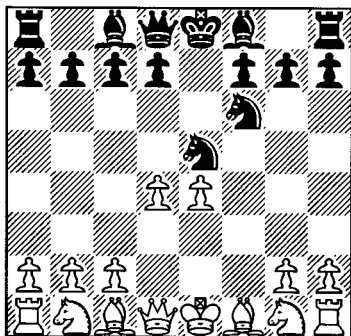
Going back to the referenced game, Black toughed it out and made his draw after 12...♜xf3 13 ♜xf3 0-0 14 ♙f4 ♖d7 15 ♙e1 ♙fe8 16 ♙xe8+ ♙xe8 17 ♙xc7 ♙c8 18 ♙d6 ♙xc3 19 ♙e3 ♖f6 20 ♙e2 b5 21 ♙b4 ♙c8 22 c3 ♖d5 23 ♙e5 ♖xb4 24 cxb4 a6 25 a4 bxa4 26 ♙a5 ♖f8 27 ♙xa6 ♙c3 28 ♙xa4 1/2-1/2 V.Vorotnikov-S.Galdunts, Würzburg 1992.

4 ♖f3

White has two important alternatives here, 4 fxe5 and 4 ♖c3 – let's take them in turn:

a) 4 fxe5 leads to an amusing analytical argument across many years. In his famous tournament book, *New York 1924*, Alekhine comments, "White evidently gets nothing from 4 fxe5 ♗xe5 5 d4 ♗g6 6 e5 ♖e4 followed by ...d7-d5"; while exactly 80 years later, John Cox

wrote in his *Starting Out: Alekhine's Defence* that, after 5 d4

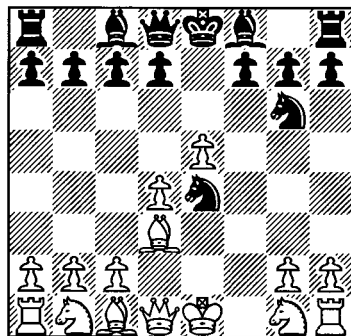


"Retreating must be bad" (so much for Alekhine's 5...d6!) and gives the piece sac 5...dxe4 6 ♖e2 (not 6 dxe5 ♖h4+ 7 g3 ♜xg3 8 ♜f3 ♖e4+ and Black wins) 6...d5 7 dxe5 ♖h4+ 8 g3 ♜xg3 9 ♜f3 (9 hxc3 is worth considering) 9...dxe2+ (if 9...♖h5, 10 hxc3! is strong, now that White has the knight development tempo: after 10...♖xh1 11 ♔g5 White is better with two active pieces for the rook) 10 ♜xh4 ♜xc1.

Cox stops here, with the evaluation that Black has compensation with three pawns for the piece, but after the plausible follow-up 11 ♜d2 g5 12 ♜g2 ♔g7 13 ♜xc1 ♔xe5 14 c3 I prefer White, as I see some good blockading knights and only one passed pawn for Black – in other words, it looks like more of a middlegame position to me, in which the piece should outweigh the three pawns.

I'm going to have to go with the World Champion on this one! Returning to our first variation, Alekhine's

idea was tested in the following game: 4 fxe5 ♜xe5 5 d4 (for 5 ♜c3, see below) 5...d6 6 e5 (not 6 ♔d3 ♜xe4!, based on the check at h4) 6...dxe4 7 ♔d3



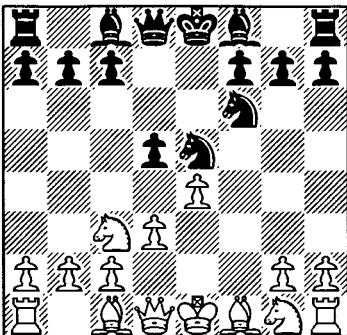
7...d5 (or 7...♖h4+!? 8 g3 ♜xg3 9 ♜f3 ♖h3 10 ♜g1 ♜h5, when White's best is 11 ♔f1 ♖f5 12 ♔d3 ♖h3 with a draw according to Fritz) 8 ♜f3 ♔e7 9 c4 ♔g4 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♜c3 ♜xc3 12 bxc3 c5 13 ♜b1 b6 14 ♔e3 ♜c8 15 ♖a4 ♜c7 16 ♜be1 ♔d7 17 ♖d1? (White blunders; 17 ♖b3 with equality is correct) 17...cxd4 18 ♜xd4 dxc4 (Black picks off a pawn) 19 ♔b1 ♔h4 20 g3 ♔e7 21 ♖h5 ♜c5 22 ♜f3 ♜a5 23 ♔g5 ♔c5+ 24 ♔e3 ♔e7 25 ♔g5 f6 26 exf6 ♔xf6 27 ♜d1? ♔xg5 0-1 M.Schwamberger-S.Maus, German Team Cup 1991. White can only resign, as 28 ♜xg5 ♜xf1+ 29 ♔xf1 ♜xg5 30 ♜xd7 ♖f6+ wins the queen.

It seems that one can follow Alekhine with confidence, and aim to outplay the opponent in the middlegame, rather than forcing the play in the opening.

Instead of the contentious 5 d4, White can simply develop with 5 ♜c3,

as played by Madame de Rémusat vs. Napoleon, which can lead to interesting developments. I have a rather naughty postcard that presents a view of the lovely and quite naked Madame playing Napoleon, the latter in full uniform – in such a situation I would have been rather distracted, and the great general himself apparently was affected: 5...♟f4 (Napoleon commits his cavalry too early – 5...♞d5 was correct, transposing to variation 'b' below) 6 d4 ♖h4+ 7 g3 ♜f6 8 ♜h3 (Madame herself appears quite flustered; she could win a piece here with 8 ♟f4!) 8...♜f3+ 9 ♜e2 ♜xd4+ 10 ♜d3 ♜e5+ 11 ♜xd4 ♟c5+ (having gained the initiative, Napoleon strikes boldly) 12 ♜xc5 ♜b6+ 13 ♜d5 ♜d6 and mate occurred in Madame de Rémusat-Napoleon, Paris 1802.

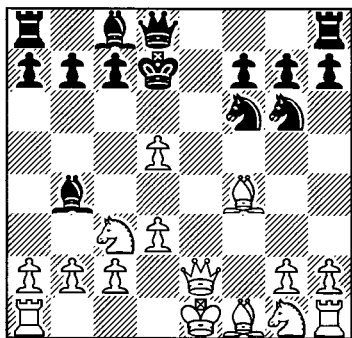
b) 4 ♜c3 d5 (Black strikes back in the centre; note that Vorotnikov's favourite move order to reach this position is 1 e4 e5 2 d3 ♜c6 3 ♜c3 ♜f6 4 f4 d5) 5 fxe5 ♜xe5 and now we have a further two branches:



b1) 6 d4 is Vorotnikov Draw #2: 6...♜c6 7 e5 ♜e4 (once again we see this typical Alekhine manoeuvre) 8 ♜xe4 dxe4 9 ♟e3 ♟e7 10 ♜e2 ♟g4 (Black is quickly better in view of his lead in development, but accuracy is required) 11 c3 O-O 12 ♜c2 ♟h4+ 13 g3 ♟f3 14 ♜g1 ♟g5 15 ♟f4 ♜a5? (too slow! – 15...♟xf4 is correct, immediately starting the attack: since 16 ♜xf4?! ♜xd4! 17 cxd4 ♜xd4 gives Black a tremendous position, White has to expose his king with 16 gxf4 and after 17...♜h4+ 17 ♜g3 ♜e7! Black is better with the threat of ...♜f5 – but not 17...♜xh2?? 18 ♜h3, trapping the queen) 16 ♜a4 ♟xe2 17 ♜xe2 ♜c6 18 ♟h3 ♟xf4 19 gxf4 ♖h4 20 ♜g3 ♜xf4 21 ♜f1 (Vorotnikov alertly completes his development and finds counterplay) 21...♜h4 22 ♜b3 g6 23 e6 fxe6 24 ♜xe6+ ♟g7 25 ♜d7+ ♜e7 26 ♜e3 ♜ae8 27 ♜xf8 ♟xf8 28 ♜xe7+ ♜xe7 29 ♟g2 ♟g7 30 ♜xe4 ♜xe4+ 31 ♟xe4 ♜d8 ½-½ V.Vorotnikov-S.Gavritenkov, Tula 1995. Notice that the final position is actually plus equals – with a modern time control, sans draw offer, you would have to defend this in sudden death, which would not be at all easy!

So this shows that, while the opening was far from threatening, and Black should have come out on top (see the note to move 15), a bit of carelessness and imprecise timing could leave you with a tough ending to hold.

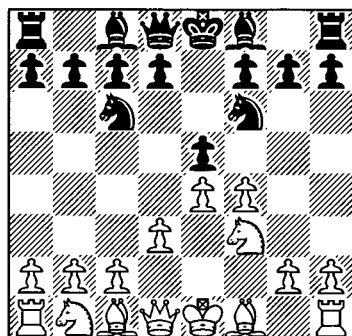
b2) 6 exd5 is Vorotnikov Draw #3: 6...♟b4 7 ♟f4 ♜g6 8 ♜e2+ ♜d7!!



An amazing move by a world-class player; suddenly White is in difficulties, though he hangs on and makes his draw. When Kengis had this position as Black (Würzburg 1994) he failed to venture the wild king move, played the “safe” 8...♙e7, and eventually lost to Vorotnikov! One sees that Kengis (recall his similar loss to Jonny Hector mentioned in a note to Game 69) was uncomfortable in these Alekhine Declined positions. But you have to face them! It’s very important that the player about to take up Alekhine’s Defence be as prepared for 2 ♖c3 and 2 d3 as for 2 e5!

Now back to the game after Black’s 8...♙d7: 9 ♜f3 ♘xf4 10 ♜xf4 ♘xd5! 11 ♜d4 (if 11 ♜xf7+ ♙e7+ 12 ♜xe7+ ♙xe7 and Black’s lead in development gives him more than enough for the pawn) 11...♜g5 12 ♘f3 ♜e3+ 13 ♜xe3 ♘xe3 14 ♙d2 ♘xf1+ 15 ♜hxf1 f6 16 a3 ♙d6 17 ♘e4 ♙f4+ 18 ♙c3 b6 19 g3 ½-½ V.Vorotnikov-W.Unzicker, Moscow 1991. Black’s two bishops might look like a significant advantage, but the

white knights are well placed in the centre – still, I would play on with Black.

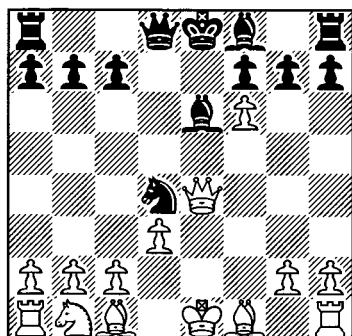


4...d5!

“This bold pawn sacrifice assures Black at least an even game” – Alekhine.

5 exd5

5 fxe5 is worse, as Alekhine pointed out, but the fearless Vorotnikov nonetheless made Draw #4 on the white side of this! 5...dxe4 6 exf6 exf3 7 ♜xf3 ♘d4! 8 ♜e4+ ♙e6



Alekhine leaves off here, stating that White’s game is “clearly unfavourable”. Vorotnikov calmly continues

9 ♖d1 (instead, 9 fxg7 develops Black: 9...♙xg7 10 ♜a3 0-0 11 ♙e3 ♜f5 12 ♙c5 ♙xb2 13 ♜b1 ♜e8 14 ♙e2 ♙c3+ 15 ♖d1 ♜g5 16 ♜g4 ♜xg4 17 ♙xg4 ♜e3+! 18 ♖c1 ♙xg4 19 ♜b3 ♙g7 20 ♜b5 ♜d5 0-1 M.Kraft-E.Leimeister, Griesheim 2002, was a quick and savage crush) 9...♜xf6 10 ♙f4 0-0-0 11 ♙e5 ♜f2 12 ♜d2 ♙c5 13 ♙g3 ♜f6 14 c3 ♜f5 15 d4 ♜xg3 16 hxg3 ♙xd4! 17 ♙d3 (if 17 cxd4 ♜xd4 and Black will double rooks with a winning attack) 17...♙b6?! (a little more boldness would have won the game; the bishop should keep sac'ing itself! – after 17...♙xc3! 18 bxc3 ♜xc3 19 ♜b1 c6 20 ♙e2 ♜he8 Black has a decisive attack) 18 ♖c2 ♜xd3 19 ♜xd3 ♙f5 20 ♜e4 ♜g6?! (this blocks the g-pawn, a key element in the attack; even now Black wins with 20...♜e6 21 ♜ae1 ♜e8 22 ♜h4 g5 etc) 21 ♜ae1 ♜e8 22 ♜h4 (the rook cannot be attacked!) 22...♜e6 23 ♜f4 ♖b8 24 g4 ♙g6 25 ♜e2 c6 26 ♜f3 ♙c7 27 ♜f5 ½-½ V.Vorotnikov-J.Ditter, Würzburg 1994. Vorotnikov gets his draw again, even though Black should still play on with 27...♜xa2.

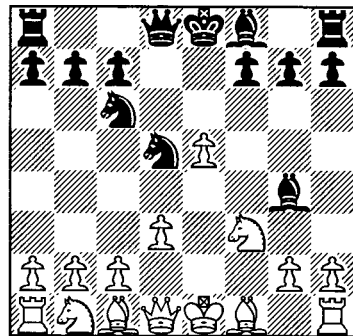
It's almost impossible to believe the way Vorotnikov draws these worse or, as in the game above, dead lost positions – but as mentioned at the beginning of the main game, he even makes a plus score with his opening, and he did beat Kengis! I think the key element is that 2 d3 is his “home ground”, and even when his position is at its worst, he still feels comfortable. And one

should note, when Black fails to put him away, Voro often reaches superior endings.

5...♜xd5 6 fxe5

Weaker is 6 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 7 fxe5 ♙c5 8 ♜f3 (the variation 8 c3 0-0 9 d4 ♜h4+ with a winning attack shows why White should not have exchanged his king-protecting knight!) 8...0-0 9 c3 f6 10 e6 ♙xe6 11 d4 ♙b6 (11...♜e8 looks even stronger) 12 ♙d3 f5 13 0-0 c5 14 c4 ♜b4 15 d5 ♙xd5! (a clever combination) 16 cxd5 ♜xd3 (Black picks up a pawn, as the knight is immune due to ...c4+) 17 ♜c3 c4+ and Black went on to win in E.Messina-R.Visintin, Asiago 1995.

6...♙g4



7 ♙e2

Besides this natural defence to the pin, it's worth taking a look at a couple of alternatives:

a) 7 ♜c3 might pass for a plausible development move, except for one slight hitch: it loses by force! I had this position in a rapid game, and without really thinking (not realizing I was al-

Alekhine Alert!

ready winning!) played 7...♙b4?, and after 8 ♔d2 the momentary tactic was gone and the game was eventually drawn in M.Sokolovsky-T.Taylor, Los Angeles (rapid) 2005.

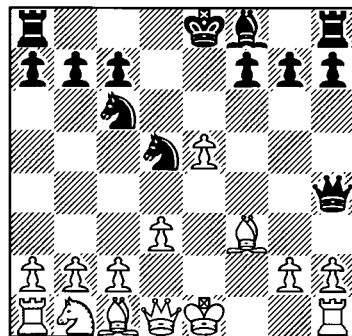
Instead, Black wins at once with 7...♙xf3! 8 ♖xf3 (of course not 8 gxf3 ♖h4+ 9 ♔d2 ♙b4 10 ♖e1 ♗d4 and Black wins major material; 10 a3 ♗d4! is the same debacle) 8...♞db4 and White perishes due to his exposed king and the weakness of c2. As 9 ♖b1 ♞xc2+ allows Black to recover his pawn with a winning attack, while 9 ♔d1 and 9 ♔d2 both lose to 9...♞xc2! with a devastating fork in prospect, White can only protect the c-pawn with the queen. But after 9 ♗d1 (9 ♗f2 ♞d4 is about the same, minus a flight square for the white king) 9...♞d4 Black crashes through; e.g. 10 ♔f2 ♞dxc2 11 ♖b1 ♗d4+ 12 ♔g3 h5 and Black will collect material soon, as he continues to harass the white king.

If you play Alekhine's sharp counter-attack with 4...d5, you must be mentally ready to attack at once, as you could have a winning position by move 7! And if you do, don't miss it like I did!

b) 7 c3 is analyzed by Alekhine, though not quite correctly according to the silicon serpent: Alekhine gives 7...♞xe5 8 ♖e2 ♙d6 9 d4 ♙xf3 10 gxf3 ♖h4+ 11 ♔d1 0-0-0 12 dxe5 ♞he8 "with a penetrating attack", but Fritz refutes this with 13 ♗g2! threatening both ♖h3+ and ♙g5. Correct is 7...♗d7! 8 d4 0-0-0 9 ♙e2 f6 and Black has more

than enough for the pawn, as he breaks up White's centre and opens the game to exploit his big lead in development.

7...♙xf3 8 ♙xf3 ♖h4+

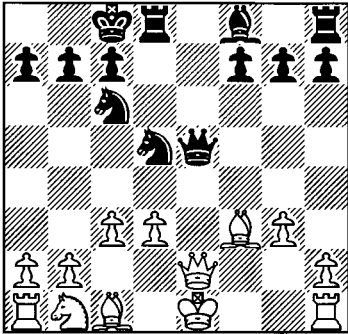


9 ♔f1!)

"Neglecting to castle is a blunder with serious consequences" – Alekhine. Maybe the world champion overstates the case a bit; White is still alive, even if his game is practically very difficult (see the note to move 11).

Nonetheless, 9 g3 is certainly better. Although Black players, generally following Alekhine's analysis, have done well (as the practical examples show), I think I have found the best (but very rare) continuation for White, which shows this line is playable for the first player, when a double-edged queenless middlegame can result. The critical point comes after 9...♗d4 10 ♖e2 0-0-0 11 c3 ♖xe5 which is, so far, Alekhine's analysis. He now gives 12 0-0 ♖xe2 13 ♙xe2 ♙e7 intending ...♙f6 (Black plans to mousetrap a white rook if it takes on f7) and writes, "with practically an even game." Both sides have alterna-

tives around this point – let's take a look:



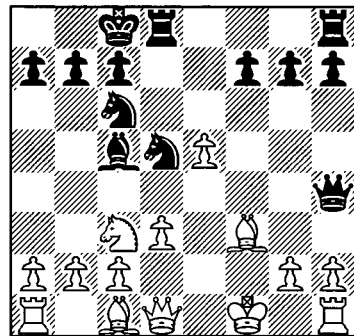
a) 12 0-0 ♖xe2 13 ♙xe2 f6 (simpler than Alekhine's recommendation, for after 13...♙e7 14 ♜xf7 ♙f6, it's true the white rook is trapped, but it's also not clear how Black captures it, as White has counterplay with 15 ♙f4) 14 ♘d2 (14 ♙f3 is better) 14...g6 15 ♘c4 b5 16 ♙e3 ♙c5 17 d4 ♘xd4! 18 cxd4 ♙xd4 and Black recovered his material with interest and eventually won the end-game in I.Novak-M.Konopka, Slovakian Ch., Topolcianky 1993.

b) 12 ♜xe5 ♘xe5 13 ♙e2 c5 restrained White's centre and Black stood well in T.Civin-P.Freisler, Czech Ch., Olomouc 1995, though the game ended in a draw.

c) 12 d4! (in my opinion this is White's best move, immediately activating his centre pawn) 12...♜xe2+ 13 ♙xe2 g6! (weaker is 13...♜e8 14 ♚f2 ♙d6 15 ♙f3 ♘f6 16 ♘d2 ♙d7 17 ♘c4 ♙e4+ 18 ♙g2 f5 19 ♘xd6 ♘xd6 20 ♙f4 h6 21 h4, when White certainly has some advantage in view of his two

bishops, and Black soon blundered and lost in H.Dutschak-D.Krenz, Würzburg 1997 – the only game in the database where 12 d4 was played) 14 0-0 f5 15 ♙f3 ♙g7 gives rise to a double-edged position where the black knights balance the white centre with Chigorin-style restraint. There is too much pressure on d4 for White to advance with c3-c4; meanwhile Black has consolidated and can look for counterplay with his kingside pawn majority. This line might represent best play for both sides, but is untried in practice.

9...0-0-0 10 ♘c3 ♙c5



Black ignores the threat to his knight, in view of a slightly larger one on f2!

11 ♘e4

White's last chance is 11 g3 ♜h3+ 12 ♙g2 ♜f5+ 13 ♜f3, when – as hard as this is to believe – I can't find any advantage for Black. The best I see is 13...♜xf3+ 14 ♙xf3 ♘db4 15 ♙d1 ♘xe5 with equality.

11...♘e3+ 12 ♙xe3 ♙xe3

Now the "overpowering bishop", as

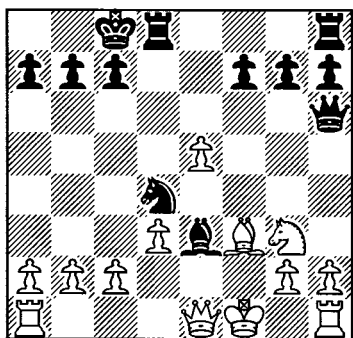
Alekhine Alert!

Alekhine comments, gives Black a significant advantage despite the pawn loss. One should note again that opposite-coloured bishops aid the attacker.

13 ♖e1 ♜h6!

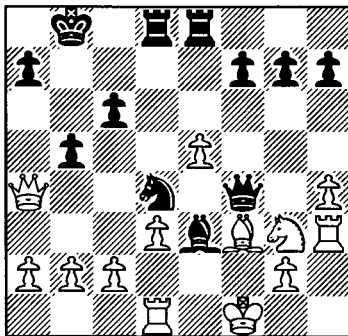
Black can avoid the exchange of queens as he is unconcerned with regaining his pawn, but rather focused on mating the white king!

14 ♜g3 ♜d4!



“Decisive” says Alekhine, and this author and even the evil *Fritz* concur. White’s rooks are not playing (especially the king’s rook), while Black’s minor pieces are probably twice as active as their white counterparts. Alekhine easily brushes off White’s following desperate counter-attack, though passive defences would also fail; e.g. 15 ♖d1 ♜he8 16 c3 ♜xf3 17 ♖xf3 (or 17 gxf3 ♜xe5 with a winning attack, since the white king position is even weaker than before) 17...♜xd3 18 ♖f5+ ♜d7 19 ♜d1 ♖a6+ 20 ♜e2 ♖e6 21 ♖xe6 ♜xe6 “with a winning ending” – Alekhine.

15 ♖b4 c6 16 ♖a4 ♜b8 17 ♜d1 ♜he8 18 h4 ♖f4 19 ♜h3 b5!



Winning a piece, as after 20 ♖b4 a5! 21 ♖xa5 ♜xf3 the knight can’t be recaptured, and the “overpowering bishop” defends the check at b6!

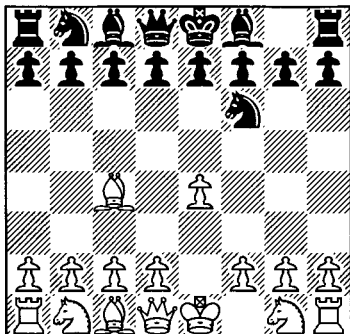
20 ♜h5 bxa4 21 ♜xf4 ♜xf4 22 c3 ♜xf3 23 ♜xf3 ♜xe5 24 ♜xf7 ♜f8 0-1

In this variation (essentially a reversed Philidor Counter-Gambit) Black gets tremendous attacking chances right out of the opening (note that I was objectively winning by move 7 and Alekhine had a decisive advantage by move 14). Vorotnikov loves this line for White, but in almost every game he has to come back from worse or dead – and yet, one has to admit that the line is playable! In the crucial note ‘c’ to the 9th move, I show that White can in fact equalize, which is quite a success in this variation!

Although the Alekhine player cannot play an Alekhine after 2 d3, one should not be unhappy, as you will get an easy game in the opening and might even win like Tal or Alekhine himself!

Game 74
M.Xheladini-Z.Varga
 Basel 2007

1 e4 ♘f6 2 ♙c4

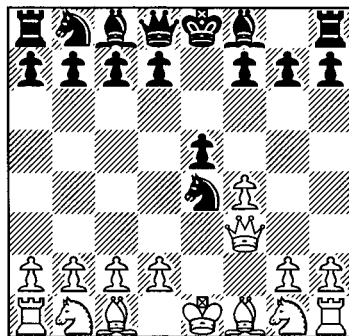


As is “well known”, Alekhine’s Defence is so powerful that it must be avoided at any cost!

We’ve already covered the respectable 2 ♘c3, the doubtful 2 d3, and now we are scraping the bottom of that proverbial barrel. The most entertaining of the bottom scrapers is not the text move but the mad Latvian idea I came across in the notes to the following game: White played 2 f3 d6 3 d4 g6 4 ♘c3 and reached an excellent line against the Pirc by transposition, though lost after misadventures in G.Chandler-J.Henderson, Scottish Team Ch. 1994. Not so startling in itself, but check out this note: “Edinburgh players will know that Geoff was hoping for 2...e5 3 f4 with a pure Latvian Counter-Gambit in reverse!”

What an idea! I was stunned to dis-

cover that *this had actually happened*, though by a different move order: note that White gets not a reversed Latvian (which would be a King’s Gambit) but rather a *pure* Latvian with White playing Black! This is achieved by the tempo loss given in the note above (f2-f3-f4) and was achieved in the actual game via 1 e3 e5 2 e4 ♘f6 3 f4! ♘xe4 4 ♖f3 reaching a critical Latvian position.



Nunn’s solution (for 1 e4 players facing the Latvian) is 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 f5 3 ♘xe5 ♖f6 (the same position with blindingly different colours) 4 ♘c4 fxe4 5 ♘c3! with the advantage, as detailed in his book *Secrets of Practical Chess*.

In the reversed variation (with the same tempo count), Black should play 4...♘c5 5 fxe5 ♘c6! with the advantage à la Nunn – but the stunned second player did not find this: 4...d5 5 d3 ♘c5 6 fxe5 ♘e6 7 c3 c5 8 ♙e2 ♘c6 9 ♖g3 ♙d7 10 ♘f3 ♙e7 11 ♘a3 a6 12 0-0 g5 13 ♖f2 0-0 14 ♘c2 ♘g7 15 d4 ♙f5 16 ♘e3 ♙g6 17 ♘g4 ♘e6 18 dxc5 h5 19 ♘f6+ ♙xf6 20 exf6 ♖xf6 21 ♘xg5! (White makes use of the Latvian f-file to land this sud-

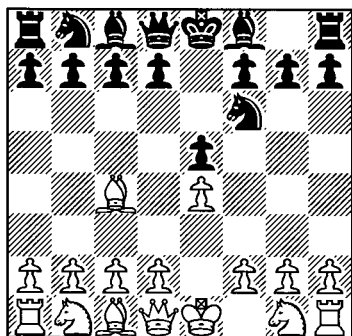
Alekhine Alert!

den tactical blow, after which he has a clear advantage) 21...♖xf2+ 22 ♜xf2 ♜xc5 23 ♕e3 ♜e6 24 ♕f3 ♜ad8 25 ♜xe6 fxe6 26 ♜af1 ♖g7 27 ♕b6 ♜d7 28 ♜d2 ♜e5? 29 ♕d4 ♜f5 30 ♜e1 1-0 S.Patzer-D.Emde, Willingen 2007. The wonderfully named Patzer scores the full point, as after 30...♖f6 31 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 32 ♜e2 ♕e4 33 ♕xe4 dxe4 34 ♜xe4 ♜dd5 35 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 36 ♖f2 ♖f5 37 ♕xe5 ♖xe5 38 ♖e3 White easily wins the pawn ending.

But of course a little familiarity with Nunn's analysis could go a long way, in the unlikely event that you will face a Latvian Gambit with Black!

Returning to the less entertaining dregs at the bottom of the barrel, beginner's moves like 2 ♖e2 and 2 ♖f3 have also been played, but they have no theoretical value. Black can always answer 2...e5 with a good game.

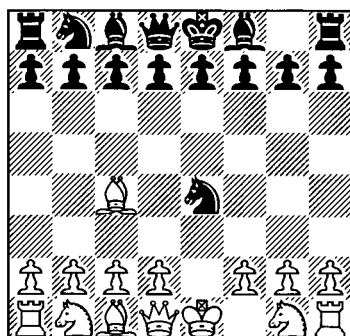
In fact, even after 2 ♕c4 Black can answer 2...e5, transposing to the Bishop's Opening.



I remember a long ago note in *Chess Life*: the American Grandmaster Arthur

Bisguier played this way against the top Soviet GM Alexander Zaitsev at Tallinn 1971. After 1 e4 ♜f6 2 ♕c4 e5 the comment was made that Zaitsev did not want any "Wild West" play in the opening that could result from 2...♜xe4 3 ♕xf7+.

Unfortunately for Zaitsev, the result of his caution was that he quickly obtained a lost position, and only made a draw when Bisguier missed the win on move 20: 3 d3 c6 4 ♖e2 ♕c5 5 ♜c3 b5 6 ♕b3 a5 7 a3 d6 8 f4 a4 9 ♕a2 ♖a5 10 fxe5 dxe5 11 ♕d2 ♕g4 12 ♜f3 ♜bd7 13 ♜d5 ♖a7 14 ♜e3 ♕e6 15 ♕xe6 fxe6 16 ♜g5 ♜f8 17 ♜g4 h6 18 ♜xf6+ gxf6 19 ♖h5+ ♜d7 20 ♜f3 (20 ♜f7! should win for White) 20...♜d8 21 ♖e2 ♖c8 22 ♜ac1 ♖g7 23 g3 ♜g6 24 c4 ♖f7 25 ♖h3 ♖d7 26 ♜e1 bxc4 27 ♜xc4 ♕a7 28 ♕a5 ♜df8 29 ♜f3 f5 30 ♜d2 fxe4 31 ♜xe4 ♜f3 32 ♜xc6+ ♖b8 33 ♜d6 ♜e3+ 34 ♜d2 ♖b5 35 ♕c3 ♜f4 36 ♖f1 ♜e2+ 37 ♖xe2 ♜xe2 38 ♖xe2 ♕d4 39 ♜f1 1/2-1/2. 2...♜xe4



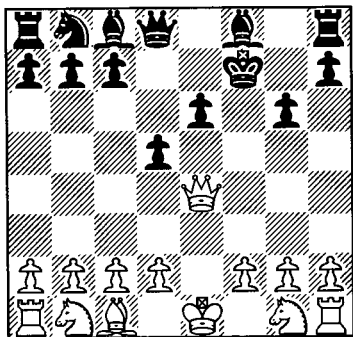
Our hero Varga fearlessly takes on the Wild West!

This is the principled response: just take the centre pawn! Despite a ton of games with this in the database, White can only manage 45% after this simple move. White must struggle to get his pawn back, in the process giving up his only developed piece while losing a bunch of tempi with his queen.

3 ♖xf7+ ♜xf7 4 ♜h5+ g6

The attempt to keep the piece is obviously suicidal: 4...♜e6 5 ♜g4+ ♜d5 6 c4+ ♜d4 7 ♜e2+ ♜d3 8 ♜a3 ♜c6 9 ♜f3 mate. But 4...♜g8 5 ♜d5+ e6 6 ♜xe4 d5 is also good; e.g. 7 ♜e2 c5 8 f4 ♜d6 9 d3 h6 10 ♜f3 ♜h7 11 0-0 ♜f8 12 ♜e5 ♜d7 13 c3 ♜xe5 14 fxe5 ♜xf1+ 15 ♜xf1 ♜e7 (Black is already clearly better with a good French structure, the two bishops, and the safer king) 16 ♜g1 ♜d7 17 ♜d2 ♜e8 18 d4 cxd4 19 cxd4 ♜g6 20 ♜f1 ♜c8 21 ♜d1 ♜b5 22 ♜e3 ♜c2 23 ♜d2 ♜d3 24 ♜f1 ♜xd1 25 ♜xd1 ♜xb2 26 ♜d2 ♜b1 27 ♜f2 h5 28 g3 ♜g6 29 ♜g2 ♜xf1+ 30 ♜xf1 ♜xf1 31 ♜xf1 ♜g5 32 ♜f2 ♜f5 33 ♜e2 ♜e4 0-1 B.Vuckovic-B.Golubovic, Nova Gorica 1998.

5 ♜d5+ e6 6 ♜xe4 d5

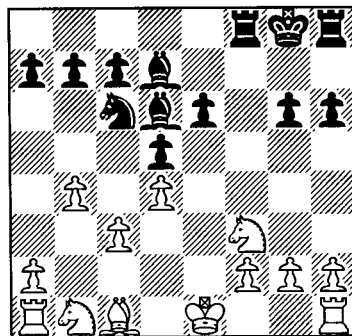


White had no reasonable alternative lines against Black's simple play, but the result is that Black is already somewhat better in view of his central control and two bishops.

7 ♜f4+ ♜g8 8 ♜f3 ♜d6 9 ♜h6

Self pinning with 9 ♜e5 doesn't work so well: 9...♜e7 (9...♜xe5 10 ♜xe5 ♜c6 11 ♜e3 e5 is also good) 10 d4 ♜c6 11 0-0 ♜d7 12 ♜d2 ♜f8 13 ♜e3 ♜xe5 14 dxe5 ♜c5 15 ♜d3 ♜f5 and a pawn falls.

9...♜f8 10 d4 ♜c6 11 c3 ♜d7 12 ♜xf8+ ♜xf8 13 b4 h6



14 0-0

If 14 b5 ♜a5 15 ♜a3 ♜f5 and Black stands better with play on both sides of the board.

14...g5 15 ♜e1 ♜f5 16 ♜bd2 ♜h7 17 ♜f1 g4 18 ♜h4 ♜f7 19 g3 ♜hf8

Black methodically improves his position.

20 ♜e2!? e5!?

20...♜e8 might be stronger; e.g. 21 ♜e3 e5 22 ♜xd5 ♜e6 with a clear plus.

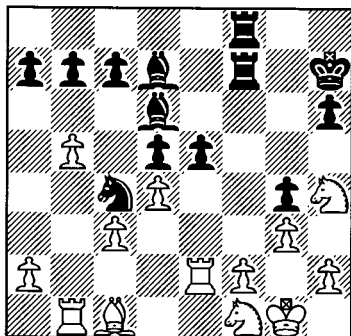
21 b5 ♜a5 22 ♜b1

22 dxe5 is White's best try, as after

Alekhine Alert!

22...♙xb5 23 ♖b2 ♙xf1 24 exd6 ♙d3 25 dxc7 ♖xc7 26 ♙f4! ♜c4 (26...♖xc3 27 ♙d2 ♖c5 28 ♙xa5 ♖xa5 29 ♖xb7+ equalizing is White's point) 27 ♖b5 ♙d7 Black only has a small advantage.

22...♜c4



Now Black has the ...e6-e5 break in for free and stands clearly better.

23 ♜e3 exd4 24 cxd4 ♖e8 25 ♖b3 ♖e4 26 ♜g2 ♖xd4 27 ♖c2 b6 28 ♖b1 h5 29 ♖b3 c6 30 bxc6

Black is a pawn up and has no reason to seek complications – so why does he sacrifice here?

30...♙e6?

The natural 30...♙xc6 is correct; e.g. 31 ♜ef5 (if 31 ♜hf5 ♜xe3+ 32 ♙xe3 ♖c4 33 ♜xd6 d4+ 34 ♜f1 ♖xc2 35 ♙xd4 ♙f3 36 ♖b1 ♙d7 or 35 ♜f7 dxe3 36 ♖e3 ♖a2 wins) 31...♙d1 32 ♜xd6 d4+ 33 f3 ♙xf3+ 34 ♜xf3 gxf3+ 35 ♖xf3 ♜xd6 36 ♖xf7+ ♜xf7 and Black has maintained his extra pawn into the ending.

31 f4! ♜a5

Not 31...gxf3+? 32 ♜xf3 ♖e4 33 ♜g5+ and White wins.

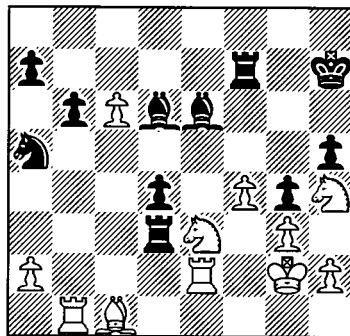
32 ♖b1

32 ♖b5 gives White a slight edge, who has recovered his pawn and has two passed pawns.

32...♙d3 33 ♖e2

Here 33 f5 is better, with some counterplay – this looks like time trouble.

33...d4! 0-1



Now Black is winning again, as the strong passed pawn advances and the white pawn on c6 drops; e.g. 34 ♜f1 (it is too late for 34 f5 ♙xa2 35 ♖xa2 dxe3 36 ♖e2 ♙c5 37 ♖a1 ♜xc6 and three passed pawns to one tell the story) 34...♙d5+ 35 ♜f2 ♜xc6 and Black is a pawn up with the better position.

Not seeing any saves, White resigned.

Varga played strong, simple chess here (except for the bobble on move 30) and shows that Black can obtain the advantage with natural moves. It's clear from this game that 2 ♙c4 is a pointless “non-variation” – unless Black is afraid of some cowboy American!

Note again that with over a hundred games in the database (a good statistical sample) White can only score 45% after 2...♟xe4 – Black can chop with confidence!

The most entertaining of these barrel scrapers is of course 1 e4 ♞f6 2 f3 e5 3 f4??! with an albino Latvian – said gambit seems to be clearly unsound but has claimed many victims who are unfamiliar with it, and the Alekhine player (especially if you also play 1 e4 as White) should take a look at the mad Latvian sometime!

Summary

This chapter, which contains nothing

to remind us of the true Alekhine with 1 e4 ♞f6 2 e5, may nonetheless be the most important in this book.

Nowadays the trend is to play to draw with White, while trying at any cost to get “your” opening (even with a worse position) as opposed to “playing your opponent’s game”. Actually trying to get the advantage with White by playing the best moves seems to have disappeared along with the spirit of Bobby Fischer!

While objectively there is no dangerous move against the Alekhine except for 2 e5, in practice you should bone up on your Vienna, Four Knights and Latvian!

Repertoire and Final Note


Now you brave Alekhine players have something against every variation that White can throw at you!

You have to watch out for that Modern! Fight to the death like Bagirov, Kengis and Carlsen!

Beat the Exchange like a gong à la Larsen!

Fracture the Four Pawns like Sergeev!

Counter-Attack the Chase like Korchnoi!

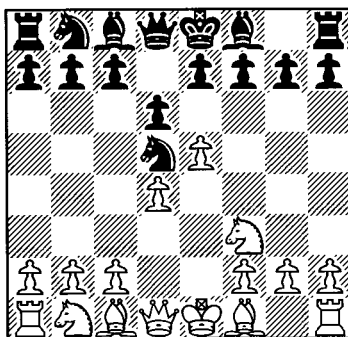
And bust everything else up like Vaganian, Varga – and this IM, whose writing has, I hope, entertained and instructed you as you prepare to go to war against 1 e4 with Alekhine's bold 1...f6!.

The End

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4...♗g4 5 ♗e2

5...c6 6 0-0 dxe5 – 18

6...♗xf3 – 36

5...e6 6 0-0 ♗e7 7 c4 ♘b6

8 h3 – 27

8 ♘c3 – 38

Alekhine Alert!

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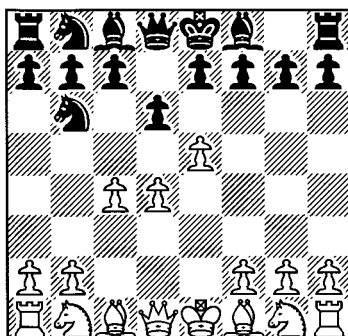
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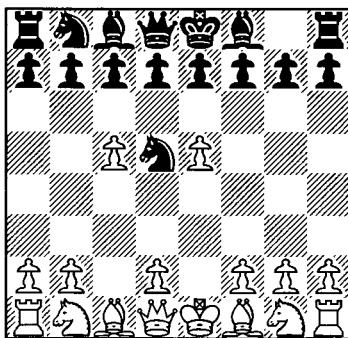
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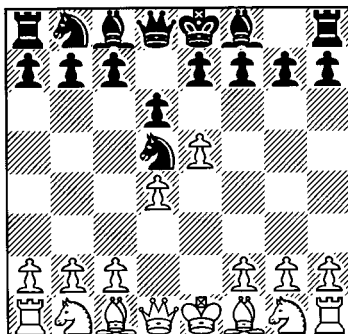
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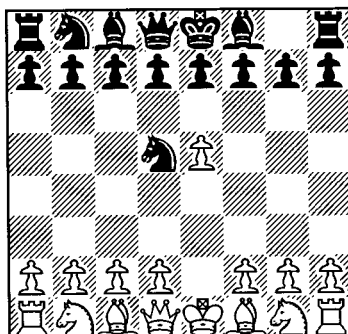
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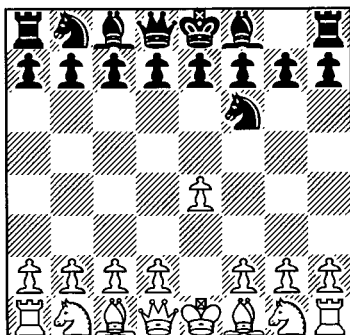
3 ♙c4 ♘b6 4 ♙b3

Alekhine Alert!

- 4...c5 – 17
4...d5 – 235
3 ♖c3 e6
3...♗xc3 4 dxc3
4...d5 – 16
4...d6 – 23
4...♖c6 – 29
4 ♗xd5
4 d4 ♗xc3 5 bxc3 d5 – 230
4...exd5 5 d4 d6
6 ♗f3 – 226
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Chapter Ten: Alekhine Declined

1 e4 ♗f6



- 2 ♕c4 – 269
2 d3 e5
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3 f4 – 261
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2...d5?! 3 e5! – 240
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a repertoire for Black against 1 e4

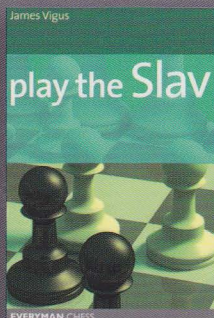
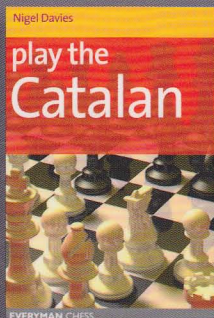
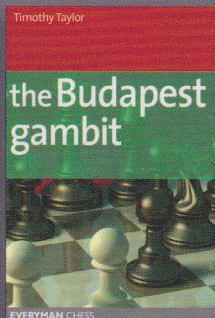
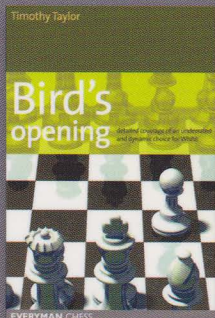
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